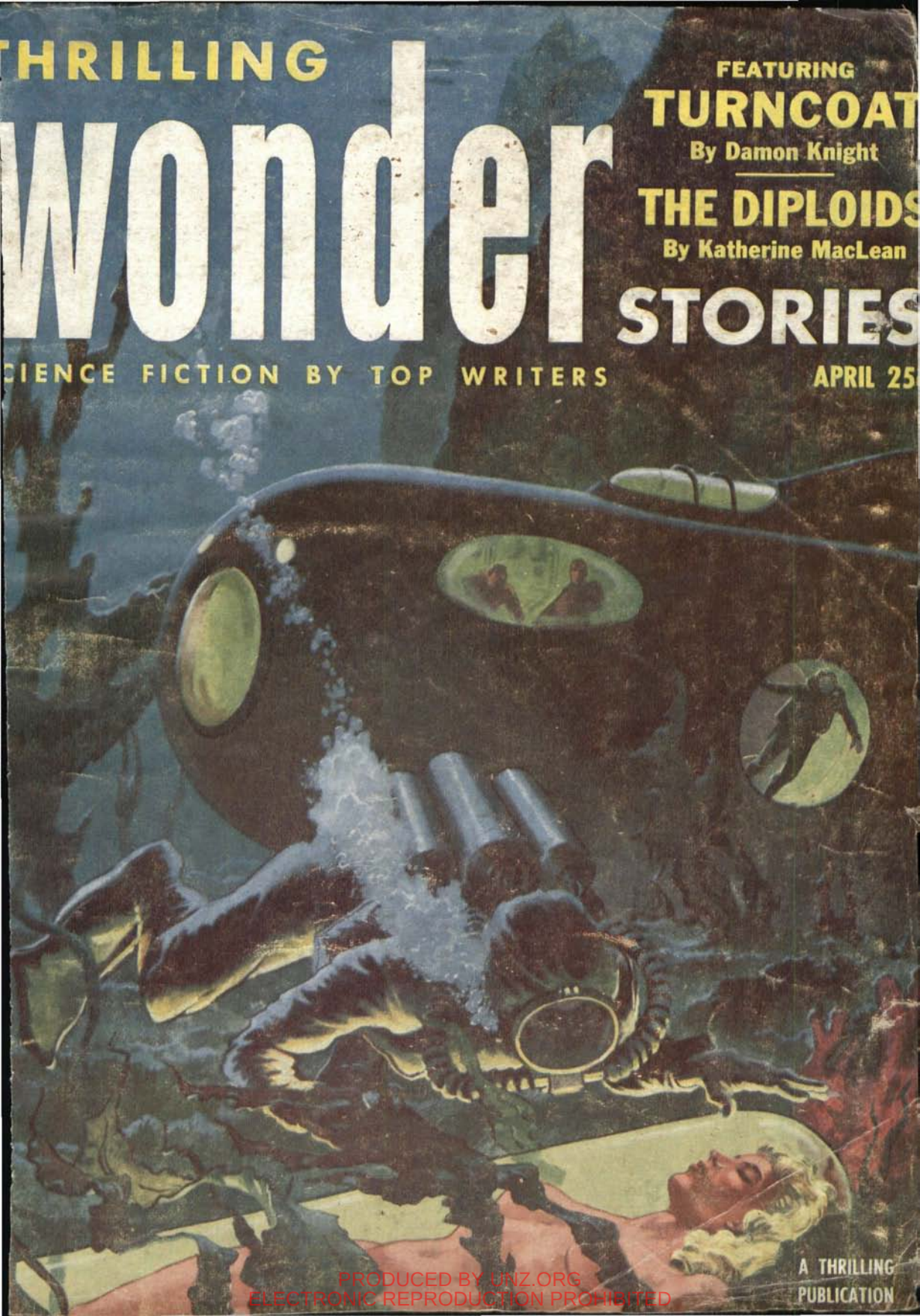

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LOOSE FALSE TEETH?

The makers of POLIDENT offer you Double Your Money Back unless this

Amazing New CREAM Holds Plates Tighter, Longer THAN ANYTHING YOU EVER TRIED

POLI-GRIP

Double Your Money Back Unless it Gives You

MORE COMFORT, MORE SECURITY THAN YOU EVER HAD BEFORE

Yes, the people who make Polident, the world's largest selling denture cleanser, are standing right behind their new adhesive cream, Poli-Grip, with an ironclad guarantee. You get double your money back, if Poli-Grip doesn't hold your plates tighter, longer than anything you've ever tried.

And that's not all. See if you don't find that Poli-Grip does all these wonderful things for you, too:

1. . . . form a cushion between your plate and gums to eliminate the friction that makes gums sore and raw.
2. . . . hold shallow lowers, despite lack of suction.
3. . . . seal the edges of plates so food particles can't get underneath to cause irritation.
4. . . . enable you to eat hard-to-chew foods in comfort, like steak, apples, celery, even corn-on-the-cob.
5. . . . give you full confidence to laugh, talk, sing without fear of embarrassment due to slipping plates.
6. hold plates tight even during strenuous sessions of coughing or sneezing.

Won't life be wonderful with all these torments behind you? Be sure to be among the first to learn the glorious comfort of holding loose false teeth tight and snug with Poli-Grip! Buy a tube at your drugstore as soon as possible.

Many tried powders, found they failed!

Read what they say about this new way:

"For ten years my teeth wouldn't stay tight for more than two hours a day. I tried powders, but nothing worked till your new *cream*, Poli-Grip, came along."
Mrs. T. W., Medfield, Mass.

"I like the cool taste of Poli-Grip and the smooth way it holds my teeth. It is easy to apply and holds tight for so long."
Mrs. L. W. N., Ottumwa, Iowa

"I found your new cream, Poli-Grip, very pleasant and mild-tasting and it held my loose plates very tight, longer than anything I've tried."
Mrs. H. D. M., Beadentown, Florida

"I like the wonderful holding strength of your new *cream* better than anything I've ever used. I like Poli-Grip's refreshing taste, too."
H. B. V., East Canaan, Conn.

"I definitely prefer Poli-Grip to other products I've tried. It holds my plate tighter and feels comfortable longer. Poli-Grip is cooling, soothing, never gritty."
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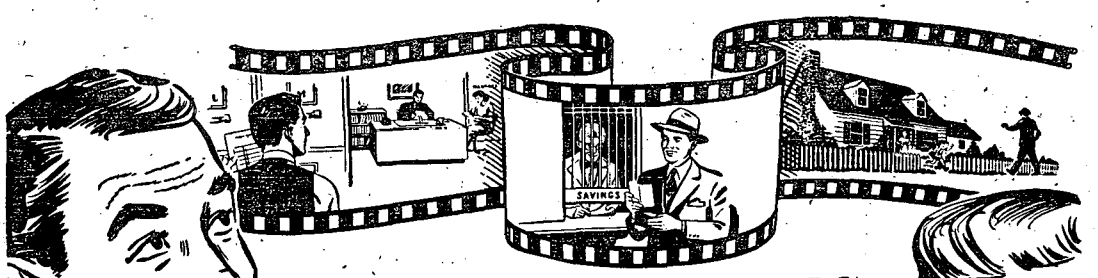

Picture yourself going places

You've done it often. Call it day-dreaming if you like, but you've seen yourself in a bigger job — giving orders and making decisions — driving off in a smart new car — buying your family a fine home.

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2. I want a good time.
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THRILLING
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VOL. XLII, NO. 1 A THRILLING PUBLICATION APRIL, 1953

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The mirror image of the world he knew was a wretched travesty of everything sacred or sane, and he was trapped in the middle of it

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BROTHERHOOD WEEK

FEBRUARY 15-22nd

NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF CHRISTIANS & JEWS

THE LINGERING CRIMES

A Brotherhood Week Message

By CLAUDE G. BOWERS

Famous writer, historian and diplomat

SOME years ago I witnessed on the balcony looking down upon the hall of Monticello one of the most moving scenes I have ever had the pleasure to behold. We were paying tribute to the old master of the mansion because of the fight he made, a century and a half before, for racial and religious freedom and toleration. The rain was falling and the day was dark. On the balcony stood the three orators of the occasion, a Protestant bishop, a Jewish rabbi and a Catholic priest. An old Negro held a candle to light the manuscripts of the speakers. When the ceremony in the mansion closed, the speakers led a procession down the hill to the simple cemetery to lay wreaths on the grave of this statesman, a man called Jefferson, who envisioned a way of life in which all men might be free, and worked to make this the American Way of Life.

Not so long ago, men of decency and good will looked back upon the days of racial and religious persecution with horror and disgust. But we have seen a recurrence of cruelty equal to that of the blackest ages humanity has known. This in our own day. We have seen millions of men, women and children exterminated because of race and religion, subjected to every indignity depravity could conceive, robbed of their possessions, murdered in cold blood. We of our generation no longer can look with a condescending superiority on the wholesale assassinations of the Dark Ages.

True, these brutalities of our time were conceived and carried out by a maniac without pity or intelligence; and true, this man and all his works have been exterminated. But the prejudices, ignorance and hate that inspired his crimes still linger in petty minds; and the intolerance that wars with freedom still exists within the shadow of the memorial to Jefferson in Washington. The freedoms are challenged by bigots and fools. These would undermine and destroy the fundamentals of American freedom. They would end the civilized relations of the different races and religions that should dwell in harmony beneath the flag that symbolizes liberty.

These men of intolerance may be vicious or ignorant; they are probably both. But they have the strength of fanaticism, and they must be militantly, not apologetically, opposed!

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A DEPARTMENT FOR SCIENCE FICTION FANS

GUEST EDITORIAL

By Ted Sturgeon

JUST having left an Editors' Luncheon with speeches on the subject of Science Fiction, I find myself full of thoughts and things I'd like to toss out to y'all.

It was an interesting occasion with an interested audience. Most of the editors present knew little about s-f, apparently, and their attitude varied from clinical curiosity to wild surmise. It was pretty obvious, though, that they all recognized that s-f is a force to be reckoned with; and they're eager to start reckoning.

But have you any idea how hard it is to tell people about the stuff? I don't mean the mere process of convincing someone that he's been missing something all these years. We've all done that; the field thrives today because its readers bring in more new readers than the unaided magazines do. The difficulty I mean is in telling such a crowd as these knowledgeable editors and publishers about science fiction. There's a certain "captain-hates-the-sea" atmosphere about editors. Some editors get to be very good editors indeed because they despise the stuff they print. That way their literary emotions don't run away with them; they don't play favorites; they're obedient to the public will as expressed through the circulation department; in other words, they're objective.

So you don't reach people like that by simple enthusiasm. All that proves to them is that *you* like the stuff. There's no sense in trying to get *them* to like it; they don't want to like it. They just want to use it.

Here are some of the things which come out in approaching people on this rather cold-blooded basis—things which, in my opinion, don't get said often enough about s-f:

The cultural climate is exactly right for science fiction. People are harassed and afraid, and what they want is escape. But they're afraid enough so that they don't want to escape altogether. Only in science fiction can they keep one foot on solid ground and throw the other through limitless times and spaces (thereby creating a pressure point which accounts for s-f's difficulties with sex, but that's another column).

Nothing can stop the production and distribution of the stupider kind of s-f: the comic-book stuff, the cowboy-story that happens on Mars instead of in Arizona, or even Texas. This is because nothing can halt the stupidity of publishers who insist on being a dozen years behind the times, and who persist in the delusion that science fiction is *so* Flash Gordon, so there. But at the same time nothing can stop the great

(Continued on page 134)

Among science-fiction luminaries, the name of Ted Sturgeon has a special glow all its own because years ago Ted was writing the stories hailed as "mature" today. Beginning way back when, Ted produced an early classic—KILLDOZER—often reprinted; and his book THE DREAMING JEWELS was one of the finest fantasies of our time. He worked a spell for TIME & LIFE and had a hand in the television show TALES OF TOMORROW, but decided at last that he was primarily a writer and took to the woods. Now in a stone house considerably removed from turmoil except that contributed by a wife and brand-new baby, he is applying himself to his typewriter. This guest editorial was a spontaneous offering as only a small indication that Ted is doing some thinking about his chosen form of literature as well.

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THOUGHTS HAVE WINGS

You Can Influence Others With Your Thinking!

TRY IT SOME TIME. Concentrate intently upon another person seated in a room with you, without his noticing it. Observe him gradually become restless and finally turn and look in your direction. Simple—yet it is a *positive demonstration* that thought generates a mental energy which can be projected from your mind to the consciousness of another. Do you realize how much of your success and happiness in life depend upon your influencing others? Is it not important to you to have others understand your point of view—to be receptive to your proposals?

Demonstrable Facts

How many times have you wished there were some way you could impress another favorably—*get across to him or her your ideas*? That thoughts can be transmitted, received, and understood by others is now scientifically demonstrable. The tales of miraculous accomplishments of mind by the ancients are now known to be fact—not fable. The method whereby these things can be *intentionally*, not accidentally, accomplished has been a secret long cherished by the Rosicrucians—one of the schools of ancient wisdom existing throughout the world. To thousands everywhere, for centuries, the Rosicrucians have privately taught this nearly-lost art of the practical use of mind power.

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Scribe P.C.Y. The Rosicrucians, AMORC,
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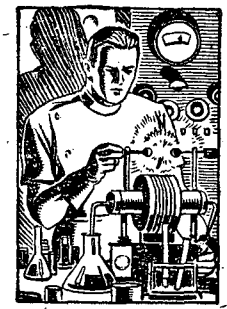
What's New in Science?



FIRST AID KITS ON SPACE SHIPS are likely to contain no aspirin. The familiar pain-killer has been discovered to increase the use of oxygen by making people breathe more deeply.

Writing in the *British Medical Journal*, Dr. J. B. Cochran of the University of Glasgow notes the results on nine experimental patients. Five were perfectly healthy, four had arthritis or rheumatism. The aspirin was given by mouth or injection. Taken by mouth, the drug stimulated an increase of 30% to 40% more oxygen and given by injection it caused an increase of 60% to 70% more oxygen. Apparently there is an increase in the body's metabolism and more fuel is consumed as well as oxygen.

IF OVEREATING IS CAUSED BY FRUSTRATION, then an intelligent reducing diet should provide emotional satisfactions to balance the things lacking in the patient's life. Since his frustrations may involve his work, his relationships with other people, his health or family, it is not always readily solved. However, while the larger problems may appear insoluble, it may be possible to substitute activities which provide minor satisfactions sufficient for the purpose. Sheer will power is not the answer in reducing.

THE TREATMENT FROM FROSTBITE has been changed again. Quick thawing is now recommended. Immersion in warm water just over 100 degrees, or short-wave treatment to apply quick heat, carefully regulated not to exceed 113 degrees Fahrenheit is most effective. It will hurt, and the pain must be controlled by sedatives. Slow thawing may permit deterioration of tissue.

At least, no one recommends bringing back the old "rub-'em-with snow" treatment.

PUMPING HEAT FROM THE GROUND to warm your home instead of burning fuel has been accomplished experimentally and is now in the stage of being perfected. Ground temperatures remain fairly constant, winter and summer, so a ground temperature of 55 can be raised to the surface by solvents in pipes, compressed and brought to a higher level of heat. It works like a refrigerator in reverse—in fact, for summer cooling the machine could be turned back into a refrigerator and still utilize the same ground temperature of 55.

TRANSISTORS MAY CROWD OUT VACUUM TUBES in the TV set of the future, doing as good a job with a fraction of the space and weight required, and being more or less permanent at the same time. At present, transistors cost about $16 and only six out of ten are usable when finished. The process needs considerable perfection before it is commercially feasible.

THE LIFE SPAN OF DOGS has been increased in step with their masters. Effective vaccines for distemper and rabies protect pets against their greatest perils, and the wonder drugs, penicillin, sulfa and aureomycin, now plentiful, are used to fight diseases caused by germs. In addition, certain diseases peculiar to dogs, such as worms, are being fought by new effective vermifuges. There are also numerous well equipped cat and dog hospitals where pets may receive the benefits of X-rays and operating rooms, blood tests and all the rest of the treatment. Dogs have long played a large part in the lab testing of new techniques which contribute to human health. It would seem niggardly then, to deny them a little of the medical progress to which they have given their unwitting cooperation.

—Dixon Wells

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Turncoat

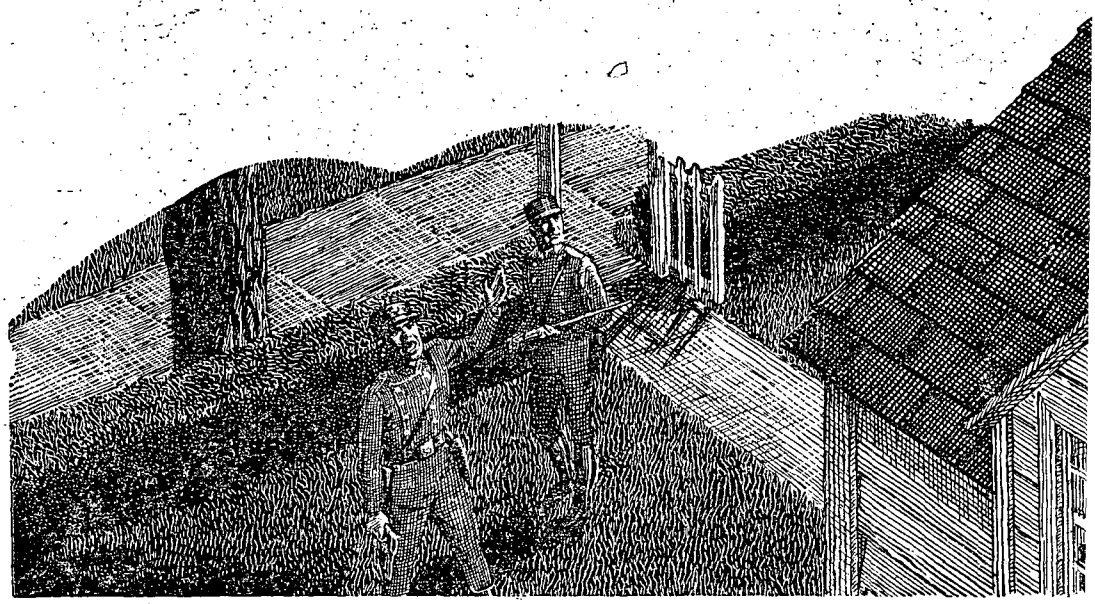
A Novel by DAMON KNIGHT

PROLOGUE

1990: THE pressroom on the eightieth floor of the World Legislature Building was a bedlam, but it quieted the minute the big sandy-haired man walked in.

"You know what we want, Doctor," somebody called. "Let's have it."

"Print this," said Dr. Kusko, enunciating clearly.



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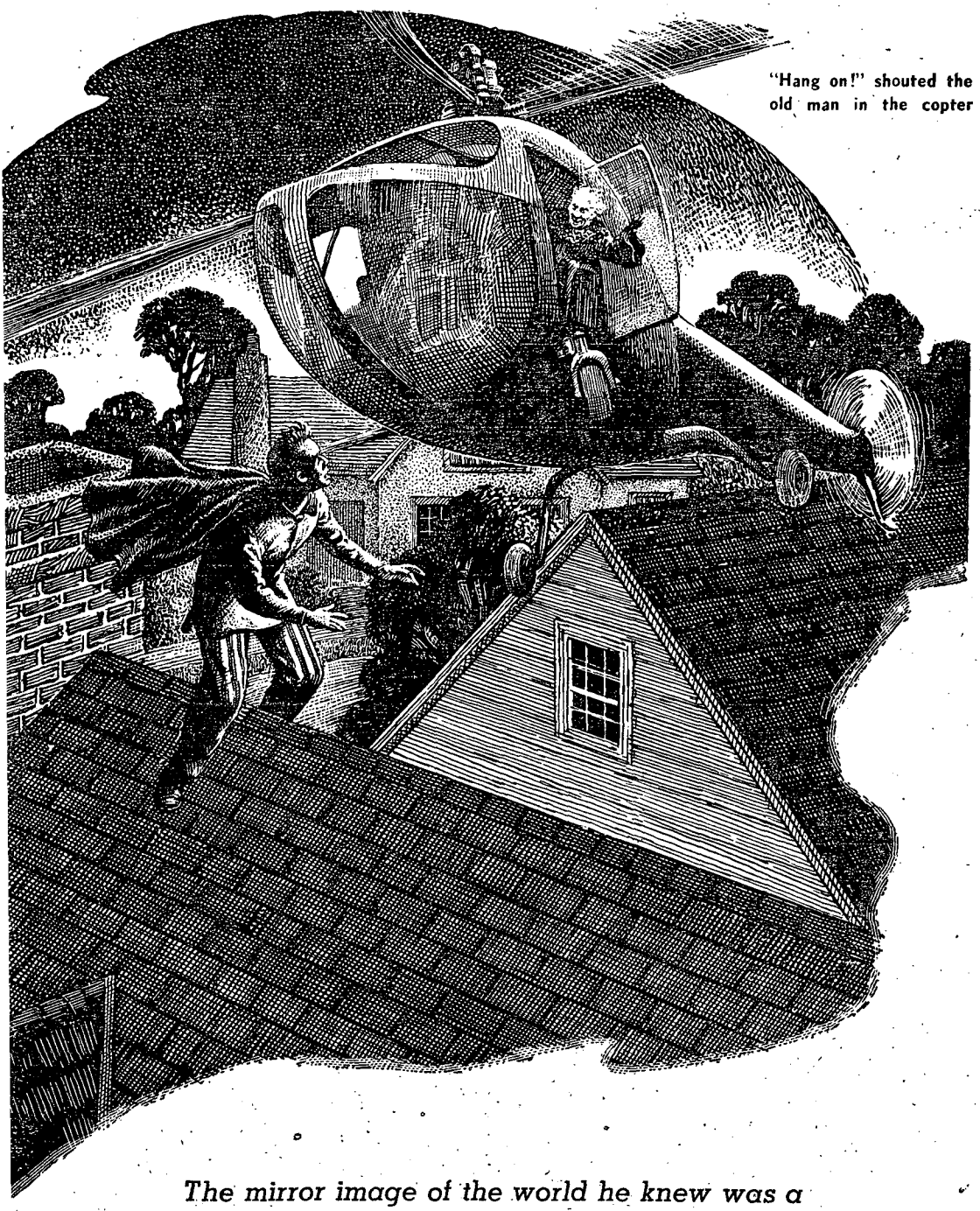

"Hang on!" shouted the old man in the copter

The mirror image of the world he knew was a wretched travesty of everything sacred or sane, and he was trapped in the middle of it

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"The passage by the World Legislature today, of the bill creating a universal analogue treatment program, not only gives me and my associates a very deep gratification, but should be a cause for rejoicing on the part of every citizen of this globe. This date marks the beginning of the world's maturity. We have put an end to war, to crimes of violence, to conspiracy against the peace, to corruption in public office, to all the myriad insanities that have oppressed and divided us since the beginning of history. From now on, we go forward."

Pencils scribbled busily for another second or two. "What are you going to do next, Doctor?" asked a reporter.

Kusko grinned. "Off the record—" A groan went up; the big man's grin widened. "Off the record, I've spent the last twenty years, figuratively speaking, in building a bug-trap. Now that it's built, I'm going to sleep for thirty-six hours, spend the next twelve getting reacquainted with my wife—and after that, praise God, I believe I can begin to get some real work done."

"Some of us thought," said a woman, "that Mr. Haggerty of the Civil Rights Commission might block the passage of the bill at this session and perhaps defeat it altogether. Have you any comment on that?"

"How could he?" Kusko asked. "Haggerty had the analogue treatment himself six years ago. He was developing a suicidal mania—off the record."

After an uncertain pause, the woman said, "Dr. Kusko, forgive me if I'm misinterpreting you—do you mean that when you treated Mr. Haggerty for that condition, that you also deliberately made it impossible for him to interfere with the passage of this bill?"

"That's what I mean," siad Kusko. "Just as all of you in this room have had the treatment to keep you from revealing anything your informant asks you to keep quiet—otherwise you wouldn't be getting this story. The only difference is, Haggerty didn't know what was being done to him. Neither did the fifty-odd world senators who came to us for one reason or another. And everything I have just said, by the way, is—very definitely—off the record."

Most of the reporters laughed. They liked Kusko; you couldn't help it.

"The end justifies the means, is that it, Doctor?" said a little man in the front row, who had not laughed.

"In this case," said Kusko seriously, "it does."

2035: "Gentlemen," said the bulky, well-groomed man at the head of the table, "now that the mutual introductions are over, you undoubtedly realize that we have here a rather unique assemblage. Here in this room are representatives of some of the major interests in every field of production in North America, from food to steel. Together, the companies we represent can clothe Mr. Average North American Consumer, feed him, amuse him, keep him healthy, house him, and sell him everything he needs or wants. And we are all interested in that same consumer, yet we are not in competition with one another. For that reason"—he cleared his throat—"I believe that every one of you will be intensely interested in the proposition I have to lay before you here today."

He glanced down the double line of faces, then consulted his notes. "As a matter of fact," he said, "there is one amendment I should make to the statement I have just made. There is, in this room, no representative of the advertising industry. The reason for that will become apparent in a moment.

"My company, gentlemen, spends seven million credits each year on advertising and promotion. I believe that figure is not greatly out of line with the average figure of our respective companies. Now let me ask you this. How would you, as representatives of your companies, like to increase the sales of your products and services, while at the same time reducing your advertising and promotion budgets to exactly zero?"

At his signal, two young men came

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forward, one on either side of the table, and began to pass out large rectangles of plastic. Mounted on each was a glossy sheet of paper bearing a three-color sketch of a young man and woman standing under a golden cornucopia, from which a shower of jewelry, miniature automobiles, hams, fountain pens and fur coats was descending into their outstretched arms. The banner-line was:

FREE! FOR A WHOLE YEAR!!!

"That," said the bulky man after a few moments, "is what I might refer to as the advertisement to end all advertisements. As you will note, the text here has been drawn up to represent sample brand names and lines of products from each of the companies and associations represented at this table. You will note that some companies have one brand name or line of products mentioned, while others have two or more.

"That has been done, in every case, to represent five percent of each company's gross yearly sales. And also you will note that the total of the free goods and services amounts, pricewise, to the same percentage—five percent of the different items that the North American Consumer wants and needs. In other words, each company will take a one-hundred-percent loss for one year on five percent of its products, in order to induce the consumer to buy *all the products of that company,* exclusive of all other competitors. I have here"—the young men stepped forward again and distributed piles of documents—"a table of estimated profit and loss resulting from this offer, based on an enrollment of ten million heads of families the first year. I believe that in every case, the capital reserves of every company represented here will be ample to cover that first year deficit."

For the first time, one of the other men at the table spoke up. "I believe," said a thin-faced oldster, "that this would be characterized as an association in restraint of trade, Mr. Dine."

"Our legal department has covered this question very thoroughly, Mr. Hoyle, and they assure me that the offer is perfectly legal. Our respective companies will be associated only for the purpose of this offer. There will be no consolidation of capital, no interlocking directorates—nothing whatever of that nature, *yet.* There is no compulsion to accept the offer on the part of any person whatsoever. All we are doing is sell-

The Deadly Cycle

IN EVERY age there have been those who sought, for reasons of power or profit, to shackle men's minds. A character named Hitler believed in the Big Lie—and it is true that for a while you can sell almost any idea, no matter how senseless, to enough people to make a difference. But in every age there are minds and spirits which cannot be deformed, no matter what the pressures, no matter how big the lies. Truth will out, if we may be pardoned a chiché, although sometimes it takes a devilish long time.

Meanwhile, there is little to suggest that the deadly cycle of intolerance and rebellion will not continue to be repeated in the future as it has in the past. Only as man becomes more ingenious the patterns will become more clever, the tortures more refined, the rebellions more cunningly fought. TURNCOAT reminds us that a thousand years from now Jefferson's warning about the price of liberty may have greater point than ever as Iron Curtains give way to atomic force screens.

—The Editor

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ing large quantities of merchandise at the same time and offering a premium—there will be a contract for the consumer to sign, over and above the analogue treatment. However, the contract is renewable yearly, and the treatment is permanent."

The assembled gentlemen smiled the sort of smiles acquired at poker tables and board meetings.

"A more important question might be," said a red-faced man with a clipped white mustache, "can you get the analogue facilities? I thought that was all owned by the government."

"No, Colonel," said the chairman, "I believe you will find that the Kusko Psychiatric Institute is a private, non-profit institution, licensed and subsidized by the government. The use of the analogue facilities is controlled by statute, but it is an interesting fact that according to the law, anyone can get analogue treatment, for a fee, to prevent him from doing anything he does not wish to do, except of course for legally compulsory acts. Gentlemen—"

He spread his hands. "I have too much respect for your intelligence to belabor the obvious to you. Let me be brutally frank: There it is. If we don't take it first, somebody else will."

I

2130: INSIDE the multiple carapace formed by his two thin undershirts, the heavier, weighted stole, young Arthur Bass itched intolerably.

Sweat trickled down his ribs across the exact focus of the itch, not relieving it but coaxing it to still greater virulence. Bass clenched his teeth and stared rigidly out across the massed hats of the Sunday crowd. Under the cod-like eye of Senior Salesman Leggett, he dared not scratch, wriggle or even change his expression.

Cursing himself silently for the frailty of his flesh, he waited until Leggett had done with his customer, then entered the amount of the last purchase on his machine, totaled it, and tore off the itemized tab, together with the customer's credit card. The customer, a jaundiced, shriveled little woman, thrust out a liver-spotted hand for them, but Leggett's voice stopped her.

"There is still time to alter your purchase, madam. This sweater"—he pointed to the image on the screen behind him—"is acceptable enough, I grant you, but this one—(thirty-seven-oh-nine-five, Bass, quickly)—is guaranteed to wear out in half the time."

Bass relaxed, sweating harder, having managed to finish punching the code just as Leggett ended his sentence. The customer stared timidly at the flimsy, bright-pink garment that was now displayed on the screen, and said something totally inaudible.

"You'll take it, then," said Leggett. "Splendid. Bass, if you please—"

"No," the customer said in a louder voice, "I *can't*, Salesman. I jist can't. 'V go m' worshing-machine payments to make, and m' houserent's due, and m' husband's been crippled up with's back all this month. And I *can't*."

Leggett achieved a noteworthy sneer simply by exposing an additional eighth of an inch of his rabbity incisors. "I understand perfectly, madam," he said. "There is no need to explain to *me*." His cold eye raked her and passed on. "Next!"

Crushed, the little woman turned away without seeing the tab and credit card that Bass held out to her, and he had to lean down from his platform and press them into her hand. In the process, as stole and jacket swung away from his body, he plunged his free hand under them and raked his nails across his short ribs, once, twice, before he straightened again.

The relief was exquisite.

The next customer was a stout man in a plain unquilted jacket and breeches, with not more than a half-dozen bangles at his wrist. Beside him, as he climbed

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up to the dais below Leggett, was a moon-faced boy of about eleven, dressed in blouse and knee-breeches so much too small for him that he could barely move.

"Onward, Salesman," the fat man wheezed. "It's my boy Tom, come to get his first suit of man's clothes."

"Onward. High time, too, I should say," Leggett rejoined frostily. "How old is the boy?"

"Just ten, Salesman. Big for his age."

Leggett's glance visibly congealed. "How long since his birthday?"

"He's just ten, Salesman, hardly past it."

"*How long?*"

The fat man blinked uneasily. "Just a few weeks, Salesman. It's the first chance I've had to bring him in, Salesman, I swear to you."

Leggett made a sound of disgust and glanced at Bass. "Seventeen-eight-oh-one," he said.

BASS, who knew his superior, had punched the number almost before Leggett finished. The item which now appeared on the screen was the most expensive boys' intermediate suit the Store carried; the fabric showed wear readily, the dye was light in color and not fast, and the stitching was treated to disintegrate after four months, rendering the garments completely useless.

Leggett stared at the man, silently daring him to object.

The customer read the price and licked his lips. "Yes, Salesman," he said miserably. "That'll do main well."

Bass entered the item.

"Ninety-one-two-seven-three," said Leggett. That was overshirts, of the same quality, in lots of five.

The next item was undershirts, in lots of ten. Then underpants; then socks; then neckscarves; then shoes.

"Step down, Tom," said the fat man at last, wearily. "Onward, Salesman."

"A moment," said Leggett. He leaned forward in his pulpit and affected to peer with sudden interest at the fat man's magenta overshirt.

"Your shirt, man, is fading," he said. "You had better have a dozen new ones. Fifty-three-one-oh-nine, Bass."

"'Scuse me, Salesman," the fat man said jerkily, "that'll better wait till next time. I've bought so much for the boy, I've nothing left to buy for myself."

Leggett raised one gray eyebrow. "You surprise me," he said. "Bass, what is the man's credit balance?"

Bass tapped keys. "One hundred ninety point fifty-three, Salesman Leggett," he said.

Leggett stared down his nose at the customer. "Nothing left,' you said."

"Two hundred's legal," the fat man said, his jowls quivering, "and it's not even the end of the month yet. I know my rights—you can't intimidate me—I need that money for expenses. C'mon, Tom."

A murmur of outrage arose from the crowd. Peering down slantwise without moving his head, Bass could see the fat man and his son descending into a barrage of angry stares.

Despite himself, Bass too was trembling with disgust. The very fatness of the two was unspeakably offensive—the greasy swollen jowls, the necks folding over collars, the barrel thighs. How anyone could get himself into that condition on an orthodox diet, Bass was unable to imagine. They must gorge themselves like squirrels, eating till they choked, storing their wealth up under their skins because they could express their selfishness in no other way. Who did they think they were—Stockholders, perhaps, or Executives?

Leggett was silent, hands folded across his red-and-silver stole, staring down at the two through half-closed eyes. Here and there in the first ranks of the crowd, Bass saw a man or a woman surge abruptly forward with red face and uplifted fist, and as suddenly fall back, listening to angelic voices audible to them alone. *If this were the bad old days,* he thought, *there would be a riot.*

The fat man turned at the foot of the dais. "I know my rights," he said angri-

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ly, and held up a balloon-fingered hand. "Give me my card."

Bass stood motionless, waiting.

Leggett said expressionlessly, "You may know your rights, man, but you have not yet learnt your duties. I therefore offer you a choice. Will you appear in Sumptuary Court with your boy and his birth certificate—and explain why you did not equip him with intermediate clothing until he had all but burst out of his last primaries—or will you make this additional purchase for the benefit of your soul? Eleven-five-two-six, Bass."

The item that appeared on the screen was a complete costume in black pliovel, from turkey-feathered hat to buckled sandals—gala clothing, designed to be worn once, on an important occasion, and to fall apart after. The price was Cr. 190.50.

Someone shouted, "Good for old Leggett!" A whisper of laughter swelled to a roar.

Only Leggett did not smile. He stared down with the faintest expression of boredom and disdain as the fat man, legs planted, bracing himself against the laughter that swept round his ears, raised his fists to the level of his scarlet jowls and then dashed them down again.

His expression did not change until the fat man, two tears of rage squeezed out of his eyes by the swelling of his cheeks, opened a shapeless mouth and bellowed: "Die of a disease, y' rotted vice-eaten mud-lick'n dogson!"

The crowd's voice died as if cold water had been flung in its collective face. With no more sound than the scrape of one shoe, it moved back radially in every direction.

Into the silence that followed Leggett's voice dropped and burst:

"A demon!"

Next instant, Leggett's hand slapped the panel in front of him, and a fiendish clangor burst out to drown the crowd's noises as it surged away in panic. Bass saw clumps of people go down at either end of the hall as force-screens sealed the doorways. He saw the fat man, fists still clenched at his sides, crouching a little, face all awry and as pale as a flour-sack. He saw the moon-faced boy, mouth open to howl.

Then came a crackle and flash at the nearer doorway, and the crowd split, turning away in redoubled terror, as three horrid black-masked men came bounding across, truncheons in their fists, lightnings at their heels.

Bass turned his head aside automatically, as from a blow. The last thing he saw was a glimpse of the fat man between two uniformed backs, pale face upturned in a desperate question, before they bore him away.

IN A few moments came the rustle of turning bodies and the gathering murmur that meant the Guardsmen and their prisoners were gone. Bass turned to face the room again, and saw that the pulpit above him was vacant. Leggett had retired to make his report to the Guard.

The customers were clotting at four or five points where, apparently, people had fainted or been injured by the closing of the force-screens. A white-robed medic came in, made a circuit of the room and left. A few minutes later he was back with two assistants and an emergency cart, around which the crowd eddied briefly until the bodies were loaded aboard and carried out. The murmur of talk had increased to a loud, steady drone.

Someone at the back of the room began to sing a hymn. Others took it up, and it contended for a while with the crowd-noise but finally sank, defeated. More people were entering constantly from both doorways. The sluggish flow past the platform gradually stopped; there was no longer any room to move.

Bass felt a trifle sick. He had heard tales of demonic possession ever since he could remember; cases were reported almost daily on the news channels; but that was not the same thing as witnessing one.

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Hearing that man curse a Salesman—and knowing that if his guardian angel had not been driven out, he could no more have uttered a word of that anathema than he could have committed murder—was like seeing an ordinary door suddenly flung open to show a coal-black fiend grinning and posturing inside.

What had gone wrong? Every child, when he was four and again at ten, was taken to the Confirmation Chambers in the Store, where an angel entered his soul through the sacred machines; and from then on, whenever he stretched out his hand to do a wrong thing, the angel appeared to him; so that no man could sin. But sometimes the angels were driven out, and demons took their places.

Why? How did it begin?

And how did he feel—the man himself, not his possessing demon—knowing that he was cut off from all human joy, here and hereafter; an object of loathing and fear in this world, a sentient cinder in the next?

Bass shuddered.

The door behind the pulpit opened and Leggett stepped through. Bass stiffened his already rigid spine.

SILENCE rippled back from the platform to the farthest corners of the room. Here, Bass knew, was a ready-made opportunity for an impromptu sermon, one that nine out of ten Salesmen would have seized. He felt a flush of reluctant admiration, then, as Leggett simply stared down at the front row of the crowd and said dryly, "Next!"

It was more effective than an hour's oratory. The incident had told its own story, pointed its own moral; there was nothing more to be said.

And every customer in the room, unwilling to admit that he had waited not to buy but to hear a lurid tale of hellfire, stood submissively till his turn came, then took without argument whatever Leggett chose to give him.

The code numbers Bass punched were all in the first-quality group now; not a garment among them that would not disintegrate after the fifth wearing. Again and again, he had to announce that a bemused customer's credit card was subzeroed. By midafternoon he realized that Leggett was piling up a sales total unprecedented in the history of the clothing department.

At three o'clock, the hall still more than three-quarters filled, Leggett stopped in the middle of a sale and said crisply, "Bass."

"Yes, Salesman Leggett."

To Bass's astonishment, Leggett turned his back, opened the door behind the pulpit and stepped through. Bass followed.

Leggett was waiting in the corridor a pace beyond the doorway. Bass shut the door behind him.

"Bass," said the Salesman coldly, "you are ordered to report to the chambers of Personnel Manager Wooten, in Block Eighteen, Level Thirty-five, at exactly three-twenty. It is now three o'clock. Before you go, since I probably shall not have a further opportunity, I wish to inform you that your demeanor and deportment today have been unspeakable. Five times, in the past hour alone, I have had to wait for you to punch a code number. You have slumped. You have shuffled your feet. You have *scratched* yourself when you supposed that I could not see you."

Stunned, Bass opened his mouth.

"I do not wish to hear your excuses, Bass," said Leggett. "Attend me. If you still retain any ambition to become a Salesman—an office for which you are grossly unfitted—let me advise you to remember this: a Salesman is the direct representative of his Store's President, who in turn represents his District Executive, and so by an unbroken chain of authority to the Chairman himself, who is the direct representative of the Infinite on this Earth. A Salesman is and must be the living symbol of rectitude, an example for others to follow to the measure of their abilities. *Not* a callow, fidgeting jackanapes." He turned abruptly. "Onward, Bass."

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"Onward," croaked Bass automatically. He choked, and found his voice. Salesman Leggett—"

Leggett stopped at the door. "Well? Be quick."

"They're going to send someone to fill in for me, aren't they? I mean, Salesman, if they don't, you'll lose your record."

"That," said Leggett acidly, "is no concern of yours," and he showed Bass a rapidly diminishing strip of his back through the closing door.

After a dazed moment Bass walked slowly down the corridor to the robing room. It was empty, the long ranks of open closets dismally gaping. Unwillingly, Bass removed his stole and cap, folded them carefully and put them away. With equal deliberation he put on his surcoat, hat, pouch, wrist-bangles and rings. Then he walked forlornly out of the room and down the long echoing corridor to the stair.

Two levels below, he crossed a ramp into the Block Nine concourse and boarded the northbound slideway. It was not crowded; few people came to Store at this hour, for fear of using up their time before they ever got to a Salesman. And then there was Sunday dinner to be gotten over with in time to come back for evening services. . . . Bass caught himself. Already, he thought with a pang of bitterness, he was thinking like a Consumer again. He might as well begin unlearning his painfully-acquired Mercantile diction, too; it would not be appreciated in a factory, or on a farm. . . .

Beyond that his mind refused to go. Dismissal from the Store was an incomprehensible, alien idea. It was like a huge object of unheard-of shapes and colors, set down before him with a "Well—what do you think of that?" He could only gape at it numbly.

Curiously, the image that came to him now was not of himself, or of anyone he loved or hated, but of the possessed fat man, in that instant's glimpse before he had looked away: the fat man's anguished face, turned up in a silent appeal.

II

"BASS."

The dun-robed secretary, with hair and face both so pale that they seemed one pasty, incongruous mass, opened her mouth for the single syllable and then shut it again, like a trap. Her myopic eyes looked not at him, or even through him, but beyond, at something indescribable in an undefined direction and at an unguessable distance.

Twice, in the half-hour Bass had been waiting, she had stood up, walked directly to the single window that opened on an airshaft, lifted her hand to open it, and then frozen there, listening, before she turned and walked mechanically back. A suicidal type, evidently; in the bad old days she would have jumped out.

Bass stood up, numb from the hardness of the long bench. Murmuring excuses, he worked his way past his neighbors' knees to the end of the row. His legs carried him up the aisle.

The door slid open at his approach, and closed smoothly behind him.

The inner office was paneled in white oak and ebony. Facing Bass as he entered, behind the desk, were three tall casement windows through which he could see the sunlit Glenbrook hills; the hangings on either side of them were of green-flushed silver damask. On the walls, in ornate ebony frames, were hung a few of the usual mottoes:

THE CUSTOMER IS ALWAYS WRONG
PARSIMONY IS THE ROOT OF ALL EVIL
A MORTIFIED CUSTOMER IS OUR BEST ADVERTISEMENT
WEAR IT OUT; TRADE IT IN; USE IT UP; START AGAIN

Behind the desk, watching him expressionlessly as he advanced, were two men. One, with a round, pink face that would have been cherubic except for the hardness of the slitted eyes, wore the white-bordered black robes of Manager's rank. That would be Wooten; but he was standing at the desk, leaning the heels of

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"These are some of your fellow students," said Laudermilk

his hands upon it. The lean, white-haired old man who sat beside him, fingering a sheaf of red file folders, wore the ruffles and scarlet lace of an Archdeputy.

"This is Bass, Your Excellency," said the man in the black robe. "Bass, I am Manager Wooten. This is Archdeputy Laudermilk, who will interview you."

"Onward, Your Excellency, Your Worship," Bass said.

"Onward," Laudermilk answered in a surprisingly deep and resonant voice. "Sit down, Bass. Now, let's see. . . ." He lifted a page of the dossier before him, glanced at the one under it, and went back to the first page. "You're twenty-one," he said. "Eyes brown, hair black, complexion fair, build medium, no scars or distinguishing marks. Yes. Both parents Consumers; both dead. Nothing ex-

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traordinary in your lineage; well, that's as often good as bad. No surviving brothers or sisters, I see. Well. You've lived with an aunt and uncle since you were quite young, is that so, Bass?"

"Yes, Your Excellency. My parents, and my brothers and sisters were all killed in an accident when I was ten. I'm the only one left."

"Yes, I see. Now, Bass, tell me something about yourself. Not this sort of statistics—" he closed the folder and leaned his forearms on it—"but just anything at all that occurs to you. What you like; what you don't like. What you think about things." He stared across the desk with an expression of rapt interest.

Bass cleared his throat nervously. "Well, Your Excellency—I like most things. I like my work. That is, I liked—"

Laudermilk nodded, smiling and squinting his eyes sympathetically. "What else? What do you do when you're not in Store?"

"I have classes, four hours a day, at the University—"

"Yes, that's right; I have that here. What do you study there?"

"It's the usual course, Your Excellency; I mean, I haven't got a dispensation. Mercantile history, logic, rhetoric, philosophy, religious economics and Consumer psychology."

"And do you like studying that?"

What was he getting at? "Yes, Your Excellency, I like it main we— I like if very much."

Laudermilk ignored the slip. "Which study do you like best?"

Bass hesitated. "Well, they're all interesting, Your Excellency, but I guess —economics and psychology. I like them a little better than the others."

LAUDERMILK nodded. "A leaning toward the scientific," he said. "Yes. Your Dean tells me that you have distinguished yourself in those two studies, although you have fallen somewhat behind in rhetoric and philosophy. That's quite understandable. Yes, Bass, I have a feeling that you weren't meant for a Salesman." He pursed his lips, tapping a long, exquisitely manicured middle finger against the desk-top.

Something in Bass's chest suddenly lost its buoyancy and sank to the bottom without a bubble. He had been trying hard not to allow himself to hope for anything other than dismissal, and had ignorantly believed that he was succeeding; now he knew better.

"Now, tell me something, Bass," said Laudermilk, animated again. "Suppose you had an opportunity to study other things—things that aren't in the ordinary curriculum—would you like that? Think it over. Do you think you would be interested enough—could you make a vocation of it?"

Bass stopped breathing for a moment. The sunken organ, whatever it was, suddenly dropped its ballast and leaped to the surface, choking him. To study the Mysteries—if, incredibly, that was what Laudermilk meant—to become a lay Doctor of Science or a Store Deacon! He would give his soul for that.

"Physics," said Laudermilk. "Electronic engineering. That sort of thing, was what I had in mind. Take all the time you want to answer."

Bass managed, "I'd like that more than anything in the world, Your Excellency."

"Good. Good. I believe you would. Well, now I'd better explain what this is all about. Every year at this time, Bass, the various institutions of restricted learning have to recruit a whole new class of scholars. That's why I'm here. We usually do most of our looking among the newer candidates for Salesmanship and other Mercantile ranks, because the type of young person we need generally does go into the Store on his own initiative. Now, the quota I happen to be filling is that of the College of Religious Sciences of California Mercantile University in Pasadena. It's a seven-year course, leading to a degree of S. R. D., and, as a rule, an immediate

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Deputy Assistant Deaconship. Now, let me warn you before I arouse your enthusiasm too much—it's a long, hard course. It has other disadvantages, too; you'll be confined to the campus for the entire seven years, and if you marry, your wife will have to undergo the same confinement. Neither of you will see anyone not connected with the College until you graduate—if you do, of course. Not everyone succeeds. And afterwards, naturally, you'll find yourself rather cut off from the sort of people you used to know, even your own family. I must warn you, it isn't a thing to go into lightly."

"I know that, your excellency," Bass said as solemnly as he could. "I'm certain I won't change my mind."

"Good. Very good. Now, let's see. . . ." He flipped the pages of the dossier, one after another, studied something on the last one, folded them down again. "Tell me, Bass, how do you get along with your angel?"

BASS had half-expected the question, but he felt his ears growing red. "I —haven't seen him for years, Your Excellency."

"H-m. Yes. Well, that's nothing to be ashamed of, Bass. You're what is known as an 'inherently stable' type. It's rather rare, though not as much so as it used to be, but it isn't anything that need interfere with your career. On the contrary, we're always on the lookout for personalities of your type, I'll tell you in confidence; they do very well in the restricted sciences.

"Well—" the Archdeputy leaned over, picked up something from the floor beside him and put it carefully on the desk: it was an oblong box-shape, a foot high, draped in a yellow cloth.

"Stand up, Bass . . . come a little nearer. That's it. Now don't be frightened. Do just as I tell you, and we'll be all right."

Without warning, Laudermilk whipped the yellow cloth free of the box.

It was frontless.

Inside, vivid against the black-enameled metal, stood a red plastic bag, labeled in yellow:

MARMON'S BEST.
SEEDLESS HYBRID RAISINS
1 POUND
Cr./45

But in the upper right-hand corner, instead of the familiar red and white "GP" for "General Products," was an obscenity: a yellow circle with a spidery black "U/M" inside it.

"Pick it up!" said the Archdeputy sharply.

Bass's head felt suddenly very large and light; his lips and tongue, especially, felt impossibly enlarged, as if they were balloons that somebody had blown up. His feet were a long way away. He swayed, and righted himself with difficulty. "Pick it up!" said the Archdeputy again.

Bass stretched out his hand to the red bag. It seemed to take a long time, and yet he wished passionately that he dared make it go more slowly. His fingers were within an inch of the thing; half an inch—

He screamed and snatched his hand back.

He was groveling on the floor in an ecstasy of fear, blubbering and sobbing, tears leaking between the fingers he had clamped over his eyes.

"No!" he shouted. "I never will. I never will again!"

"There, son, there. It's all right." Hands were under his armpits, lifting him; he groped behind him for the chair and slumped down with his face in his hands.

"Take your time."

Bass scrubbed his face with the palms of his hands and sat up straight again. He was still shaking; his eyelids were swollen and his vision blurred.

"Tell me what he said to you, son."

Bass swallowed heavily. Thoughts were swirling in his hands like trails of phosphorescence in dark water; they moved too quickly to follow, and yet he knew that he had to speak.

The words came. "He—he had a

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sword that was all dripping with fire," he said. "But it was his face that was the worst. He said, *'If you ever do that again, Arthur Bass, I will kill you.'* "

"How many times did he say it?"

How many . . . ? "Three times. Then he went away." Bass shuddered and lowered his head again for an instant.

"All right. Now, I'm sorry I had to put you through that, but we have to be sure. You'll do, Bass. Let's see, where —yes, here's the list. Bass, Arthur D. Dossier TD93080510."

Then there was something about termination pay, and plane reservations, and the Archdeputy shaking his hand; and then he was walking out past the paste-headed secretary and the rows of people in the outer office, blind to their stares.

IT WAS still early in the afternoon when he emerged from the colossal northern face of the Stamford Store; the lesser buildings that clustered around it, pebbles beside a boulder, were joined by short, violet-tinged shadows, harshly outlined on the clean glitter of vitrin and stone.

He turned up the High Street, past a row of lumpish service shops and offices, past the County Bakery, poisoning the air with freshness; past the Guard station and the cinema, into the residential area: two- and three-story frame houses, for the most part, gleaming with new paint but sagging out of plumb. Old houses—two hundred years old, many of them. They had a faint smell that no amount of deodorant could eradicate—a mustiness, a smell of memories and decay.

The quality of the light changed imperceptibly as he walked; from blue the sky turned golden, outlines softened and blurred, the shadows became mere rudly smudges. Everything was bright, hazy and depthless, like the golden landscapes in old paintings; the few people in the streets walked with bright haloes around them.

Rain began to fall in the full sunlight, so thin and gentle that Bass was scarcely aware of it until the moisture began to drip from his hat-brim.

He opened his pouch automatically and took out his raincoat; he pulled its folds apart awkwardly, so that it tore at the shoulder seam. He put it on anyhow. *Better to be seen with a cheap coat than a torn one. Better to be seen with a torn coat than with none at all. . . .*

HE PASSED through the ring of new apartment houses that surrounded what was left of the park, and walked up one of the curving paths until he reached the bench, screened by a clump of alders, where he sometimes met Gloria on her way home from the bakery. There was no use waiting for her now; she wasn't on the Sunday crew. She'd be in Store now, or helping with Sunday dinner, like everybody else —but the bench was sheltered by the trees' overhang, and fairly dry, and he sat on it.

He tried to think about it clearly.

Incredible, incredible . . . he had put out his hand to the bag, thinking about nothing but the effort it took, watching for his angel to appear—and then suddenly, without any transition, he had *known*:

There was no angel.

The Man Without an Angel—the book they had studied in the fourth year, in Miss Davenport's class. She had a brown mole on her cheek, with two hairs growing out of it.

No angel.

But until that instant, even though he hadn't seen his angel since he was nine or ten, he'd believed that was simply because he'd never tried to do anything wrong—*hadn't he?* And yet something in his mind, something of which he was not even conscious, had taken over then, smoothly, without hesitating a second—had sent him back screaming and wallowing on the floor—and when he was questioned, had put the words into his mouth: words from an old book he'd found in his father's study, dusty

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years ago—*The Detection of Demons.*

Something in his mind. . . .

A demon!

So this is what it feels like, he told himself numbly. But he felt no difference: no unholy ecstasy, no thrill of evil along his nerves. He looked at his hands, pinched his cheeks. They were the same.

But there must be some mistake! If he had waited an instant longer; if his hand had come a fraction of an inch closer to the bag—

Well, that could be tested.

Uneasily, Bass looked around him. No one was near; no one on the path or the lawns; nothing but the luminous pearl-gray curtain of rain.

He clenched his jaws. Unwillingly, forcing the words, he ground out: "General Products . . . are no good."

It was true, then. He could say the hideous words again, he knew; he could say worse things; he could do worse things; no angel would stop him.

He could kill. He could strip himself in public. He could expose himself needlessly to danger. He could make love to a woman without marrying her first. He could insult a Salesman, or even an Executive or a Stockholder.

If another bag of raisins, or a pair of gloves, or a package of cigarettes, with that label on it, were offered to him—he could *buy* it.

He could eat the raisins, smoke the cigarettes, wear the gloves. . . .

Well, an insistent voice in his mind kept repeating, *what are you going to do about it?*

Unfortunately, the question had only one obvious answer—he would have to go back down the hill to the Guard station, and give himself up.

He had known that from the beginning, but he hadn't done it. Even now, he could imagine himself walking into the Guard station, saying to the black-masked desk sergeant, "Arrest me. I have a demon." But the instant he prepared to get up, his legs refused to obey him; the whole idea became incredible. All his life he had been afraid of those silent men, whose faces were masked because they were too frightful to be seen: they were the faces of half-souled men, men whose angels permitted them to do violence, even to kill.

Miserably, he fell back an another question:

Why?

Why had it happened to him? What monstrous thing could he possibly have done without knowing it, to deserve the worst thing that could happen to a human being?

Perhaps if he understood that, then it would be easier; he could resign himself . . . and at the worst, it would be less painful to turn himself over to a friend than to a Guardsman.

It would be no use going to his aunt and uncle; they were fine people, but Consumers, with no more grasp of the finer points of theology than Consumers generally had. There would be nobody at the Store with time to advise him, not on a Sunday . . . but there was Dean Horrock, a fine scholar, who was always ready to listen to anybody's troubles, and who, besides, could make the knottiest doctrines clearer than many a Salesman.

As he walked up the hill, a thin trickle of hope began to rise in him. It was pure self-deception, he knew perfectly well; but it was better than nothing.

III

FROM the next room came the heady smell of boiling cabbage and pork and the clattering of cookery, punctuated by the voices of Dean Horrock's wife and daughters. The Dean himself was dressed in his best, pinkly clean and reeking of Sunday cologne, but his manner was as unhurried and courteous as always.

"Take your time," he said comfortably. He filled the pipe whose stench was a campus tradition, tamped it with care, puffed it alight. His gray eyes, alert behind their bulwark of pouches and wrinkles, looked at Bass candidly.

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Everyone liked and respected the Dean. It was not easy to maintain the appearance his rank demanded on a pedagogue's salary; most of the University staff were a little shabby, and no one thought the worse of them for it, but the Dean was always immaculate. He had eight children, too; and over twenty grandchildren: a good man.

"Whatever it is," he added, "if I can help you—um, um—you know I'd like nothing better. But if you decided you'd rather not tell me—um— after all, why, I'll understand that too."

Bass began haltingly, "In Store today I saw a possessed man, Dean. He cursed Salesman Leggett. The Guard came and took him away."

Horrock nodded. "An upsetting experience," he suggested quietly.

"Yes. Dean—"

Horrock waited attentively.

"Can you tell me why the Infinite lets people be possessed?"

Horrock's face writhed and twisted. A sudden spurt of meaningless syllables came out between his clenched teeth; then it cut off short. His features smoothed out; he stared upward past Bass's shoulder, listening to an angelic voice. In a moment the fit was over, and Horrock was blinking calmly at his pipe-stem.

"That's a question," he said slowly, "that has tormented men of compassion for centuries, Arthur. Why does infinite good permit the existence of evil? Mm. I'm not surprised that you feel so strongly about it. At your—um—at your age, if one has any sensitivity at all, one does . . . um . . . and even beyond your age, for the matter of that. Some very great and good men—um, um—have spent their lives in the study of that question, and without reaching any answer, um, that will satisfy everyone. In a sense, it's the core of the religious problem. . . .

"Let me put it this way," he continued. "Can either of us say that, if it weren't for the few men—um, um—and women whom the Infinite allows to be possessed, human vanity—um—and willfulness might not grow so strong, um, that we'd *all* cast out our angels?"

Bass was silent.

"A little evil, um, prevents a greater," Horrock said. The tic in his left cheek pulsed slowly, regularly. "That's only a suggestion, Arthur, a speculation. Mm. The only final answer, I'm afraid, um, is that we can't know the answer. The ways of the Infinite are not our ways. How can we judge, who are judged?" His pipe had gone out; he lit it again with tremulous fingers.

"Yes, I see that," Bass said stiffly, "I mean, it isn't the general problem that bothers me so much as—that man in Store today, for instance. What did he do to deserve what happened to him?"

"Well—" Horrock smiled a lopsided smile. "Who can say? A sin of omission—here, um, another there—perhaps, um, um, over the course of years, they added up—um, um—on the Infinite's balance-sheet, to—" He shrugged.

Bass said thoughtfully, "Yes, that's right, he was a miser." But not me, he thought unhappily; I never grudged the Store a credit, or even had an unorthodox thought, until this happened. What about me?

"Dean," he said suddenly, "there are people who *want* to do worse things than that, but their angels stop them—they aren't punished." He stopped a moment, wrestling to express the unfamiliar thought. "What I mean is, why can't the angels make people do the things they should, not only stop them from doing the things they shouldn't?"

HORROCK smiled gently. "Well I can answer that in two ways, Arthur. Taking it on the—um—mundane level, there are certain purely technical difficulties in the way of it. The Mysteries are, um, beyond my sphere, of course, but my understanding is that the sacred machines can only give us a certain limited capacity for perceiving our angels, which — um — would be burned out, so to speak, if our contact

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with them were too frequent, um, um, or prolonged. On the spiritual level—where the true answer is generally to be found—um, you remember your nursery prayers, Arthur:

"If a sin I would commit,
Angels stand 'twixt me and it.
If I would a duty shirk,
Conscience *guide me to the work.*

"We're prevented from committing, um, positive sins—first because they tend to be so final—killing a man, for example—um, and second, paradoxically enough, because they're relatively unimportant. If I want to cut someone's throat every evening—um, I *do*, by the way—that's a trivial matter, really, because the impulse has no duration and therefore no—ahem—no effect on my character. But if I want to buy less than I should, that's a serious thing. It affects not one person a day, but all of us every day: through me, um, it strikes at the very foundations of society.

"The point is, Arthur, that the Infinite is not—ahem—profoundly interested in our, our transient passions. Um—our angels stand 'twixt us and sin, just as a mother might stand between her child and—a pot that was about to fall off a shelf. The pot has nothing to do, um, with the child's development, as long as it doesn't hit him on the head. Moreover, the child—can't be expected to guard himself against the danger; he's too young.

"But the child *is* expected to learn to perform his, um, household duties, and the mother can't very well stand over him every minute to see that he does them. Mm. Do you see? If the child wants to shirk his duties, conscience—ahem—must guide him to the work—or he'll, um, go without his supper. Conscience must guide the adult to his responsibilities, too—or he'll go without salvation. And salvation, unearned, would be, um, to say the least, tasteless stuff, Arthur."

"I think I understand now," said Bass with a dry throat. "Thank you, Dean."

BASS was a proper young man, with no previous experience of any but proper thoughts; but he was learning the other kind, now, with a facility that surprised him.

"Salvation," the Dean had said, "would be tasteless stuff, unearned. . . ." And damnation, unearned? Was that supposed to have a pleasant taste?

He had searched his memory, again and again, for any sin of omission, and found nothing in his whole adult life. Until he was ten, of course, he had been a child, and had committed childish errors. Was he being condemned for those? It was unreasonable; Bass had heard stories of saintly children who walked the road of righteousness before they could toddle, and communed with their angels only to receive praise, but he had never met one—they must be extremely rare.

Clearly, then, the Infinite had withdrawn its grace from him simply to make him serve as an example, so that "human vanity and wilfulness might not grow so strong that we'd *all* cast out our angels." He had been chosen at random, as an orchardman might prune one branch from a tree.

Something, he felt vaguely, was wrong with the notion of an Infinite power without justice . . . and he could not follow up that thought; there were frightening implications beyond it—but he had made a discovery about himself, and that, at least, he clung to.

Bass did not want to die, not even to please the Infinite or edify his fellowmen.

His plans were made. Beyond the Pacific were the picturesque lands, dotted here and there on the map, where brown- or yellow-skinned men still lived in a state of nature. The Store was always asking for contributions for its missionary work there; but there must be some places left where even the missionaries had not gone.

And Bass had plane reservations for Pasadena, which—as he had verified by looking it up in his grade-school geogra-

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phy—was a part of Los Angeles, which was a seaport. He couldn't go to the College; he had fooled Laudermilk, but he couldn't hope to fool the examiners there, the very place where Deacons were made. Neither could he stay in Glenbrook after being chosen for the College. But he could go to Pasadena, slip away quietly at the airport, and get aboard a ship bound for Thailand or Timbuctoo. With any luck, he would be clear off the map long before the chase caught up with him; he could spend the rest of his life hunting wild boars and drinking coconut milk.

He had called up the airport, verified his reservation, and had the date moved back to today. He had gone home, announced that he was leaving, and suffered through a half-hour's leave-taking: his aunt's tears, his uncle's incoherent pride, his cousin's excitement. It had been hard to lie to them, but not half so hard as it would have been if he had waited the full week. He had packed three trunks which he would abandon in Pasadena, and one light grip to take with him, and seen them carted off to the airport. Now there was only one thing left to do.

He crossed the yard, skirting the massive old elm, and walked back along the side of the house to the kitchen window. Inside, Gloria Andresson was stirring something in a bowl, flushed and vigorous, tendrils of golden hair loosed at her temples. On the far side of the room Mrs. Andresson was icing a cake, and the two younger daughters were watching her.

Bass scratched gently on the window-screen. Gloria looked up abstractedly, raising a round arm to brush the hair back from her forehead. Then she saw him; her eyes widened. She glanced behind her, put down her mixing spoon and left the room. A moment later she was with him under the elm.

"Don't you want to come in, Arthur?" she murmured.

"I can't—I haven't got time. I came to say good-by."

Her lips shaped the word silently after him, her brows drawn down in puzzlement and dismay.

"I've been picked to go to Cal Merc," he said. "I have to leave today—half an hour from now."

"Oh," she said slowly. "That's wonderful for you, Arthur, but— How long will you be gone?"

"A long time. Seven years. And," he lied harshly, "they won't let me marry until I graduate."

"Oh, *Arthur!*"

"I know. I'd rather stay here, even if I had to go back to common labor, but there wasn't anything I could do."

She clenched her fists at her sides, then opened them again. "You mustn't say that," she said in a strained voice. "It's a—wonderful opportunity."

Her head was lowered, her eyes half-closed; he could see her dark lashes tangled with tears. He moved a step closer, involuntarily, and found himself breathing her perfume. He could see a tiny pulse beating in the hollow of her throat. Her breasts swelled against the dark wool, drew back, swelled again. . . .

"I'll write to you," she said faintly.

"No. It wouldn't be any good. Not for seven years. . . I'd better say good-by now."

She turned her face up and made a sudden convulsive motion toward him; checked it as suddenly, while her eyes turned to look at something invisible over his shoulder. She stood listening—listening, Bass realized bitterly, to her angel telling her she mustn't touch him, because they weren't married.

"Oh, please," she said to that invisible shape. "Just this once—"

Bass made a strangling noise in his throat and stepped forward as if he had been shoved. For an instant his arms were around her; he bumped her nose with his, and their teeth grated jarringly. Then his arms were empty.

She was standing a yard away from him, jaw hanging open, eyes staring through a curtain of disordered hair. He took a step after her. "Gloria—"

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"Get away from me," she said breathlessly. She gulped, filled her lungs, and let out a healthy scream. Then she turned and ran.

Standing where she had left him, Bass listened to the slamming of the back door, the commotion inside the house, and Gloria's voice overriding it, loud, excited and dramatic. She was telling her family all about it.

Ten minutes later, running along a back street, startled faces popping out of doors to watch him, he heard the sirens climbing the hill behind him.

IV

HE STOOD, panting a little, with his back to a wall. It was a six-foot wall, stuccoed on the other side, raw brick on this. He had crawled the last thirty yards, along a hedge that grew between two houses, before he could reach it and climb over.

Now he was safe, because he was dead. On the other side of that wall he had a name and a place, relationships, duties, obligations and rewards. On this side, he was nothing: so far as Glenbrook was concerned, he did not exist. In effect, he had committed suicide by climbing the wall. There had been nothing else he could do; he had left himself no other way.

He thought of the single moment when he had Gloria in his arms. That had probably been the world's least satisfactory kiss, he thought bitterly, and he had given his life for it. His lips tightened. What was it about the world that made it possible for such cruelty to explode in a moment out of tenderness?

She wasn't to blame for screaming when he kissed her; anyone would have done the same—but what about the gusto in her voice when she was telling her parents to call the Guard quickly, because poor Arthur was possessed?

Bass turned and slammed his knotted fist against the wall. The pain helped. Massaging his bruised knuckles, he turned again and looked around him.

Beginning where he stood, a bleak wasteland stretched for fifty yards ahead—a wilderness of hummocks and boulders, furred over with the brittle black skeletons of burnt underbrush. At his feet, and all along the wall in either direction, lay a sparse litter: soaked and wadded papers, a faded rubber ball, the fragments of a kite, broken glass, broken wood, broken plastic. There was even, Bass saw with a queer absence of shock, an occasional reclaimable article —a tin can, a spike, a tangled mass of wire. Children below the angel must have done that.

The wasteland ended at another wall, convex as the first one was concave. To right and left, the burnt strip disappeared around the curve, but Bass knew that if he set out along it in either direction, the curve would turn the other way after a mile or so, and eventually he would come back to his starting point. Glenbrook was an island.

Beyond the second wall was—terra incognita.

On the maps, Glenbrook and its suburbs were enclosed in a wavering outline, shaped roughly like a lopsided kidney bean, or a fat boomerang. Around it was a blank area approximately three times as large; then, to the northeast, came Norwalk, minutely detailed, with all its rivers and roads; and to the west, White Plains. The whole map of the continent was like that: islands of civilization in an ocean of blankness, or in some places, large civilized tracts with blobs of white in them, like the spots of leprosy. To north and south, civilization dwindled away; the map became all white.

It was disconcerting to see the other wall so near. Somewhere, long ago, he had heard a story passed on from someone who had glanced through when a section of the Glenbrook wall was being repaired; and the story was that the wasteland went on and on, indefinitely.

But of course it couldn't be so; now that he thought of it, Bass realized that he had often looked over from the top

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of the hill, and seen the Others' phantom rooftops, looking almost near enough to touch. Anyhow, Glenbrook was larger now than it had been when he was a child; three or four new streets had been added on the periphery to house the growing population. Perhaps the Others had been doing the same on their side, until now there was hardly room left in between for one more block of houses.

The Others: the bat-winged monsters, who dressed in clothes of iron that never wore out; and ate their own children; and lived in caves that they scraped out of rock with the tines of their terrible hands. . . .

Bass hesitated, suspended between one motion and the next. For a moment it seemed incredible that he was here at all; what was the known terror of the Guard compared to the marrow-chilling emptiness that lay ahead of him?

His body had tensed itself, as if he were standing at the edge of an abyss, nerving himself to jump. Deliberately, he took the first step forward. Then the next. Gray flaky ash puffed up around his feet as he walked; black char grimed his shoes and the cuffs of his trousers.

HALFWAY across the ground began to slope upwards; as he climbed, a gray triangle appeared over the wall ahead. More and more of the thing rose into view as he approached it; he was watching it so intently that he did not notice the other things to right and left of it until he had almost reached the wall. They were tilted brown planes—like the roofs of houses. The triangle in the middle might easily be another house, seen end-on; but Bass was not deceived.

These appearances were part of the screen of illusion the Others had set up; evidently they were not simply pictures painted on a roof of canvas, as Bass had always half-consciously assumed; they might be wickerwork structures; painted to resemble houses from a distance; but that was not important. In a moment he would be over the wall, *under* that screen, however it was made; and he would see things that men were never meant to see.

The base of this wall, too, was strewn with discarded objects. Bass did not let himself hesitate again. He climbed recklessly onto the sagging ruin of a barrel, hoisted himself to the top of the wall, and dropped over.

He was in a yard.

Yellowed grass straggled over bare earth, worn hard and smooth under the clothesline. Beyond that, a house: screened back porch with hoe- and rake-handles leaning against it, blank upper story—no windows facing the Wall—garden hose coiled around a standpipe at the corner.

It was a replica, in all but the smallest details, of the house it faced across the Wall in Glenbrook. To left and right, across the low hedges, Bass saw other houses, equally prosaic, equally familiar.

An orange tiger-striped cat got up from under a bush, stretching lazily. Bass started convulsively and backed up against the Wall. The cat hesitated a moment, one forepaw lifted, then came over and rubbed itself against his legs, purring raucously.

Bass stared at it. Cats, he realized abruptly, had no angels; and it was a poor tom that couldn't leap a six-foot wall. It was odd to think that he might have seen this very animal in the streets of Glenbrook, never dreaming where it had come from. . . .

Or was it a cat?

If that house was not a house, then the garden hose might be a serpent, and the cat might be—

He backed away from it cautiously. It followed him for a couple of steps, then sat down and began licking its chest.

Bass worked his way out to the front of the house, pausing after every step to listen. He heard nothing. Through a kitchen window he saw a long bare table, with chairs of a vaguely disturbing pattern ranked around it. In the dark living room were the angular bulks of a sofa

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and easy chairs, the pale gleam of a mounted picture on the wall. There was no footfall or murmur of voices; the house was empty.

So was the street. House after identical house, down the long declining perspective into the last sunlight in one direction, the gathering twilight in the other.

Bass turned left and followed his endless shadow toward the darkness. It seemed incredible, but if it was going to be like this all the way, why couldn't he work his way around Glenbrook to the eastward and then head north up the coast—stealing food, sleeping in ditches—until he reached Boston? It wouldn't be as good as Los Angeles, of course, but surely he could find a ship bound for some Central American port, then cross the Isthmus to the Pacific.

In his excitement, Bass forgot that there would be no food to steal in the Others' territory—that the Others, being demons incarnate, ate nothing but dirt, rusty iron, stones and their own offspring. He strode along faster and faster down the empty street; the darkness and the silence and the unburdened motion of his own body made him feel so secure that, by the time he reached the end of the street, where it ran into the curving wall, he had lost all caution.

He turned to his right up another dim, vacant street. He was actually whistling when, just before he reached the fifth corner, two things happened simultaneously:

The street lights flared up.

Three grotesque travesties of human beings walked into view from the cross-street, looked over their shoulders, and saw him. . . .

THERE was an unmeasured, and, for Bass, immeasurable period of time when he couldn't move. He saw the goggle-eyed parchment faces of the three etched sharply under the street-lamp. He saw their mouths bulge into tall black O's; he heard their screams. Then, unaccountably, two of them were running away—jumping-jack figures trundling their oval black shadows far down the street—and the third was lying quietly on the pavement at the corner.

The two running figures were gone. Bass heard their shrieks, faint and fainter down the street, then silence.

He didn't understand. He stood there transfixed, feeling the automatic unreasoning urge to turn and run the other way, but still aware enough to wonder: *why should demons run from him?*

The third demon still lay where it had fallen. Warily, one step at a time, Bass approached it.

It was dressed, like the other two, in fantastic garments—a fringed green cape, shoes with calf-high tops, a bulky thing like a purple shirt worn outside the green-and-saffron-striped trousers. A crutch with a heavily padded top lay on the pavement a foot away from one outstretched hand.

The shape of the thing was almost human. A fold of the cape was tossed over the side of the head, shadowing the face, but Bass could make out the arched, old-man shape of the nose, and the pinched mouth. The eyes were squeezed tight shut.

It was breathing; Bass could hear the noisy, whistling insufflations, each followed by a long pause and then a gasp as the thing let out its breath again. Cautiously, he poked it with his foot.

The thing squeaked and flinched away. Bass saw the gleam of its eyes as they flickered open for an instant. It was awake, then.

Poised, ready to run, Bass waited for a long count of five; then he nudged it again, harder. The thing flinched again and a weak old-man's voice came out of it. He couldn't make out the words.

He leaned over. "What?"

The voice came again, and this time Bass thought he understood. In a hideously slurred and distorted parody of Glenbrook Consumer dialect, the demon was saying, "Oh Inf'nite help us . . . I can't stand it. . . don't let the dirty thing touch me."

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The more he thought about that, the less sense it made. He felt a prickling along his spine, and the impulse to run came back, stronger than before. He fought it down. His intuition of danger was inarguable—as specific and meaningful as the perception of heat or pressure—but the obvious, automatic answer might be the wrong one. You can run away from a fire or a blow, but not from a paradox.

And, Bass realized abruptly, this sense of danger that he felt was twenty years late. He had been like a blindfolded man on a tightrope all his life, and he was just finding it out.

Deliberately, with a gigantic effort, he put aside all his preconceptions. He was standing on a sidewalk under a street-lamp, and at his feet there was a—man—who gave every evidence of being half-paralyzed with shock and fear. He bent over the sprawled figure again.

"Who are you?" he demanded.

The weak voice piped, "Oh Inf'nite, oh Inf'nite, I can't—"

"Answer my questions," Bass said sharply, "and I won't hurt you. Who are you?"

There was a long pause. "Only old George Parsons," said the voice hesitantly, "who never hurt anybody. Only old George—"

"Why are you afraid of me?"

The creature's eyes blinked open incredulously, then squeezed shut again. "You're a demon," he said faintly.

Bass felt as if his head were about to explode. "How do you know?"

The creature began babbling again. Bass nudged him sharply with his foot. "How do you know?"

The old man shrieked. "By your clo'es," he said, "By your clo'es. Oh Inf'nite in Heaven help us . . . ."

Time slowed to a trickle as Bass stared down at the cringing body. You shall know a demon incarnate by his clothing. . . Bass leaned down and carefully, hesitantly, took a fold of the old man's cape between his finger and thumb. It was not iron, it was soft fibrous cloth. *To you I am a demon to me*—he thought wildly.

When he heard the sirens begin, faint and far down the way the other two had gone, it was almost an anticlimax. Danger was not an event, it was a medium; it spread out all around him, a still current, a silent scream, to the farthest limits of his universe.

BASS had nothing to do with it; his body moved all by itself. He watched with a curious sort of detached interest as his fingers stripped off the old man's fringed green cape, worked at the lacings of the calf-high shoes, tugged at the green and saffron trousers, while the old man squeaked and shuddered.

The sirens were nearer—too near. Bass rolled the garments together into a bundle that he tucked under his arm, and then he was running headlong down the street to the right, away from the sirens that howled in crescendo behind him. . . .

Halfway down the block, he turned abruptly and hurtled across a lawn into the darkness between two houses. He kept going, around the back of the house to the right, across a dark yard, through a hedge and another and another until the glare of a street-light stopped him: he was at the end of the block.

He paused an instant to listen. Behind him the sirens had stopped; to his left, far away, he thought he could hear others wailing up out of a confused murmur of other sounds. He took a wary step forward, peering to left and right. He was about to take another when a blur of metallic scarlet whirled into view around the corner.

He leaped back and flattened himself against the wall of the house. The red car rushed silently past and was gone.

Somewhere behind him, down the long row of hedges, there was a faint sibilant sound and then the unmistakable snap of a twig.

Bass's heart was trying to shake itself loose inside his ribs. He edged

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around the house-corner, careful even in his terror to make no more silhouette than he could help against the street-light, made two leaping strides to the right and then ran for all he was worth straight across the frighteningly empty street.

Relief weakened his knees when he reached the other side safely; but two minutes later there was another street to cross, and after that another. Just before he reached the third street, one of the red cars whisked across the lighted gap ahead.

The question was, he thought as he darted across the street a moment later—the question was, when would it be safe to stop running long enough to put on the "demon's" clothes? And, conversely, how long did he dare to wait?

He crossed two hedges, carefully, trying not to make a sound; then he stopped and listened for a long count of ten, holding his breath. There was nothing closer than the faint sirens and the other mingled sounds far to the east.

He dropped his bundle to the ground and, working feverishly, pulled off his pouch, surcoat and jacket, his bangles and rings, and finally, with ineffable shame, his trousers. He put on the old man's baggy pants hurriedly, fighting down the queasiness their touch gave him, and then the cape. He picked up one shoe and knelt, groping for the other. It wasn't there—he must have dropped it somewhere without realizing it. Never mind; the intricate lacings would definitely have taken too long, anyhow.

As an afterthought, he pulled out the tail of his overshirt and let it hang over the trousers: it was a poor imitation of the loose purple garment the old man had worn, but it would have to do.

He gathered up his discarded jewelry, stuffed it into the pouch, and rolled the pouch up in the surcoat, jacket and trousers. He moved along the rear wall of the nearby house, found an open window, and dumped the bundle through. So far, so good.

AFTER a moment's hesitation, he turned and pushed through the hedge to his left. His instinct was to keep on in his original direction, but if he did that he'd be heading straight into the wall again. He had to work his way east, out of this pocket of demon territory that was surrounded on three sides by Glenbrook. But that was the direction the sirens had come from. . . .

Suddenly sick with apprehension, he lengthened his stride as much as he dared in the half-light. The next street was empty, but he waited, pulse pounding heavily in his throat, for a long moment before he started across.

As he crossed the curb, a man in a red uniform stepped out of the shadows across the street.

Bass jolted to a halt, hearing the man's unintelligible shout, seeing the glint of metal in his raised fist. He half-whirled toward the shelter of the houses behind him, then stopped, hopelessly. It was too far.

He was fairly caught. He'd have to stand where he was and hope that bluff, and his demon clothing, would save him.

The red-uniformed man came forward, moving with an odd stiffness. He held the gun rigidly trained on Bass's body. With the other hand he took a tiny instrument from his belt, spoke a few words into it and put it back again, all without shifting his glance from Bass for an instant.

Two yards away, he stopped.

Except for its revolting color, his uniform was an almost-exact duplicate of a Guardsman's, from the flat, visored cap to the polished shin-guards and heavy boots. Bass's heart leaped painfully as he saw one of the differences: in each of the mirror-bright buttons, instead of the familiar "GP," was another insigne—the same one he had seen once before, in Manager Wooten's office—U/M.

He wanted to digest the implications of that, but there was no time. His perception of danger, already at an unbearable intensity, had risen to a shrieking

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crescendo—and after an instant he understood why.

The pseudo-Guardsman had not asked him a single question.

Under the red half-mask, the man's lips were thinned to a pale line. His whole body was tense, his right forefinger white-knuckled behind the trigger-guard.

Desperately, Bass concentrated on the remembered sound of the old man's voice—the elided vowels, the harsh consonants, the rhythm of his speech. Reproducing them as well as he could, he said, "Please, sir, what've I done? I'm George Parsons, everybody knows me—"

The Guard made a sharp, jerky motion with his gun-barrel. "Shut *up!*" he said.

A red car whirled silently around the corner, hurtled to within a dozen yards of them and stopped. Almost instantly, another appeared from the opposite direction. Red-uniformed men poured out of them and moved forward with exaggerated caution, guns in their fists. Every one of them stared at Bass unblinkingly, not glancing aside even when they spoke to one another.

"Any trouble?" called one. Like the others, he spoke in a flat brogue that gave Bass no difficulty; he had heard it often enough from the Guardsmen in Glenbrook.

"Not so far, sir," said the first Guardsman. "It tried to talk to me, but I soon shut its mouth for it."

The ring of men closed in a little. "What'd it say?" one of them asked.

The first man shuddered. "Tried to tell me it was a man."

A ripple of disgust swayed the circle.

Bass's mind was turning frantically, trying to discover how he had betrayed himself. They didn't suspect, they *knew* he was the "demon" they were after. But how? His shirt was well covered by the green cape; his shoes were alien, but surely the difference was not so obvious as that under his cuffs—

"With *that hat* on the filthy head of it!" said the first man in a strained voice.

Bass's hands lifted automatically toward his head, a fraction of an inch, then dropped. Of course, he thought sickly, that was it. The old man had not been wearing a hat; he had not even thought of a hat—but he remembered now that the other two, the ones who had run when they saw him, had been wearing tall peaked constructions on their heads. And he himself was still wearing his flat, eight-segmented Glenbrook cap—so used to the touch of it that he'd been no more conscious of it than of part of his own body.

Another red car pulled up, and then another. More men joined the ring.

"All right, we can start now," said one. "McGovern, we'll use your car. You and Clintock ride back with somebody else."

A lane formed, leading to the open rear door of a car. Hopelessly, following the nearest Guardsman's gesture, Bass began to walk down it.

V

THREE men climbed into the front seat; two of them immediately turned to face the rear. Each of these rested the slim blue-steel barrel of a weapon on the top of the seat, aiming squarely at Bass.

A fourth man got into the rear compartment on the right side and settled himself carefully with his back against the side-cushions. His weapon, unlike the others, was a familiar one—a gas-pellet pistol, with its short barrel sprouting from a fat ovoid casing.

All four had clipped tiny respirator cartridges into their nostrils.

They were taking no chances whatever, Bass realized vaguely. The two in front beside the driver had something more deadly than gas-pistols, probably—solid-projectile guns, perhaps; he had heard that the Glenbrook Guard had such things, though he had never seen one.

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Even if he should somehow be able to overpower the man in the back—the only one within reach—and take his gun away, it would do him no good. If he made any hostile move toward the driver, or the other two in front, the man in back would gas him.

A Guardsman outside took a key from the driver and stepped back to lock the door through which Bass had entered. Bass turned his head to watch.

"Eyes front!" snapped the man with the gas-pistol. "Hands in your lap, and don't move!"

Bass obeyed. No chances at all, he thought. Three men with guns . . . door locked on my side . . . they daren't even let me turn my head, or move my hands.

They're afraid.

The thought was oddly exhilarating. The fear and respect of the three men with guns, surrounding him as he sat unarmed and defenseless, was an almost palpable flow. Half-consciously at first, then with deliberate purpose, Bass reacted to it: he sat up straighter, feeling his muscles loose and ready from calf to shoulder; he stared back at the fixed, stony glitter of their eyes behind the masks. His own eyes narrowed slightly and he let his lip curl slightly, as if in malicious amusement.

They reacted as if they had been struck, flinching perceptibly, fingers tensing on triggers—and at that realization, despair washed over Bass again. *It didn't matter what they thought*: the actuality was that he was hopelessly trapped, alone, unarmed, friendless—and he was on his way to be killed.

The car began to move. To his right, out of the corner of his eye, Bass could see another keeping pace with it; in front was still another. That made three. The fourth, presumably, was bringing up the rear. Again: no chances.

They turned south, then east again at the next corner. The land rose imperceptibly as they went, until they were climbing a steep hill, the Guardsmen in front looking down on Bass as if they were on stepladders. Five blocks; ten; fifteen.

The noises Bass had heard before were nearer now: shouts, screams, tatters of music, all blended into a single cacophonous roar. One of the men in the front seat made a sound of annoyance. "Go up DuPont to Hoyle," he said to the driver. "See can you get around it."

The driver punched a series of studs on the control board and repeated the instructions. Obediently, the lead car swung right around the next corner.

WITH an effort that shook him with its intensity, Bass forced his mind free of its numb paralysis. There had to be something he could do—now, while he still had some freedom to act. There *had* to be . . . if only because these men thought there was.

He had two facts to work with. One: incredibly, this world and the one he knew were like mirror twins. The people who had fled in terror at sight of him had acted just as he would have done himself, if he had seen them in Glenbrook. The common people of each world believed the other to be inhabited by monsters; and each side was horribly, tragically wrong.

The common people—not the Executives or Stockholders. It could not conceivably be coincidence that Laudermilk, in Glenbrook, had showed him the same trademark that he saw in use here on the other side. The double deception had been deliberately established, was being deliberately maintained with all the elaborate mechanism of store and state, for some purpose Bass could not imagine.

Two: The Guardsmen, despite their immense power, were as ignorant as the Consumers. That was logical, even if it made the Guard less efficient in dealing with people like Bass—and such cases must be rare; no "demon" had crossed the wall into Glenbrook in the memory of any man living. A secret like this one must be well kept, or it could

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never have been kept at all.

Less efficient. . . .

That was the clue, Bass realized, with sudden, mounting excitement. Less efficient how—and why?

The obvious answer was: because they were afraid of him. But a moment's thought was enough to show him that it was no answer at all. Certainly they were afraid . . . just as a lion-hunter might be afraid of a lion. They were courageous, trained men, proud of their hereditary calling, hardened to violence. If he attacked them, if he made a single threatening gesture, they might be terrified, but they would shoot him just the same.

What else?

Abruptly Bass found himself remembering the way they had acted after his capture—not one of them had approached him nearer than two yards until he was in the car; and after that, the one Guardsman who shared the rear seat with him had kept as far away as he could get. Caution, or—necessary inefficiency?

Not caution.

They could have manacled his hands behind his back. They could have knocked him unconscious, tied his arms and legs with enough wire to hold an elephant. They could have searched him for weapons and evidence.

All of these would have been reasonable and proper things to do; they had not done one; and why? Because every act involved touching him or his clothing—his Glenbrook clothing; his hat for instance, with its label, "GP," woven into the fabric.

And that, Bass realized, remembering a certain red-plastic bag, would have been impossible.

His heart was beating painfully fast. If he could somehow manage to touch all three of them with some article of his clothing—swiftly, and simultaneously—then shock might delay their reaction for the second he would need to leap past the man with the gas-gun, reach the unlocked right-hand door and get away.

They turned another corner, heading eastward again, up another hill. The crowd-noises grew louder.

There were two things wrong with that program, Bass thought frenziedly. One: Was the right-hand door really unlocked? He thought so—he couldn't believe he had failed to notice anything so important, and it made a distorted kind of sense: one rear door had to be left unlocked so that the men in the other cars could get at him if he overpowered the four in this one. But if he was wrong—

Two: The three Guardsmen would have to be immobilized at the same instant—an obvious impossibility. Even if they would allow him time to disrobe at leisure and select his weapons, he didn't have three arms. . . .

The thought ended as they topped the rise and headed into a blast of sound. At the end of the next block a kaleidoscopic mass of singing, shouting, screaming humanity filled the street solidly.

Bass swallowed hard. The cars would have to slow down to get through that crowd, he told himself numbly, and the Guardsmen's attention would be divided. It wasn't much help, but it was all he was likely to get.

There was no more time for deliberation. Within seconds, he would have to act.

THE lead car's siren groaned tentatively, then burst into a full-throated scream; after a moment the other three joined it. As the lead car nosed into the crowd, Bass saw that the one to his right was falling back.

Then they were in the crowd, that had parted sluggishly to let the first car through, then flowed together again, and now, with equal slowness, was opening the lane once more. Flushed, staring faces bobbed past the windows; raised arms flourished a forest of crazily tilted banners; mouths gaped wetly. The din was no longer even perceptible as sound. Bass felt it as a heavy, maddening vibration submerged by the sirens' howling.

Tension plucked fiendishly at his

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nerves. It was the same with the Guardsmen; their bodies were unnaturally rigid, eyes glittering fixedly through their masks, lips taut and bloodless. An intolerable pressure was building, building. . . .

Bass moved. His body was already tilting forward and to the right, his thigh-muscles bunching to take his weight, as his right hand darted up to his cap, seized it and swept it in the same motion at the full length of his arm straight across the faces of the two gunmen in the front seat.

Time froze. Bass saw the two gun-muzzles belch flame, and felt a clublike blow in his right side that spun him around, half-erect, facing the third man. A sudden expanding haze of grayness blurred his vision for an instant, but he saw the third man's face, teeth gleaming in the startled mouth, before the flung cap eclipsed it. Then he was hurling himself at the door, his fist slamming the catch. The door melted away in front of him and he tumbled out onto the street.

A blast of sound struck him; and a blur of color; and a dizzying wave of pain. Coughing and retching, vainly trying to keep his balance, he lurched forward into the crowd. He caromed off one dimly-seen body and into another; his fingers caught a handful of fabric and clutched it desperately for an instant until momentum sent him staggering in a new direction.

Behind him a flat, echoing roar cut across the bedlam. A chorus of screams rocketed up; screams of genuine fear and agony, not hysteria.

Bass kept going blindly, clutching at the packed bodies that impeded him, forcing them apart, swinging himself around them. The pain in his side was no more than a dull, distant ache, but his eyes were swimming with tears, and his coughing choked him so that he could hardly breathe.

Something struck him a stunning blow on the forehead and he fell, scraping his fingernails down a flat, rough surface that could only be a brick wall. He lay there, head ringing, his mind stupidly fumbling the tiny circle of his weariness and his pain, until some remembered urgency drove him to his feet again. He leaned against the wall, straining for breath, until nausea bent him double and he vomited.

When he straightened, wiping the tears out of his eyes, his head was clearer and he could see again. He had been hit twice, he realized; once with a gas pellet, once with a solid projectile. But he had been moving too fast to get more than a whiff of the gas, and the wound in his side must be a slight one; he had barely felt it. He had been lucky. . . .

But he had to keep moving, or his luck would run out.

The crowd swirled around him: men in peaked hats and women in square ones; fringed and beaded capes, green, rose, orange, lavender . . . flushed shiny faces and blind eyes . . . a banner swayed past, and he caught the letters "VE NOT, WANT"; his mind supplied the rest of the familiar motto: "Save not, want not."

NOW, suddenly he knew what his crowd was. It hadn't occurred to him before, although he should have known from the sound alone—he'd had enough else to think about, Infinite knew, and besides that, there *was* no Founder's Day this month. But this could be nothing else than the procession that climaxed a Founder's Day celebration—the disorganized, miles-long rout that followed the procession, rather. Every able-bodied man and woman in the district would be here, shouting drunk on sacramental wines, sermons, singing, dancing, mock-fights and exhortation—the only release they had, the only time they could let themselves go, year after year, as long as they lived.

He moved up the street away from the intersection, keeping as close to the wall as he could. So long as he stayed well buried in the crowd, he thought, he was reasonably safe. If he staggered, so did the celebrants: if he stared wildly

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so did they; if his clothing was stained and disordered, so was theirs. But his hatlessness could betray him. . . .

He remedied that by plucking a hat from the nearest male head. Before the man had time to turn, Bass was out of sight in the crowd. He thought he heard a dismayed shout rise up behind him, but in the clamor he couldn't be sure.

He couldn't, of course, stay in the crowd forever; he had to get out before the Guard set up a cordon around the whole area and trapped him. Neither could he afford to risk leaving the crowd at either of the nearest intersections. Almost certainly the Guard had had time to post men there. But there was another way.

This was a business district. Some of the ground-floor shops might still be staffed—dispensing sacramental wine and liquor, trademark-pendants and other holy articles—but the majority would be deserted, and, of course, unlocked. Only the Guard needed locks in a world where angels enforced the law.

There was a metal signboard, fastened just above the bobbing heads of the crowd; steeply angled from his viewpoint, but almost legible. S, T, A— He circled toward it, and in another moment was able to make out the rest. STAMFORD BOOK OUTLET. Underneath, in smaller lettering, U/M LICENSE NO. 8402331.

A book shop—perfect. Who would buy a book on a Founder's Day? Bass edged around a wild-haired woman who stood swaying and singing to herself in the doorway, turned the knob and slipped into the shadowed interior.

Light from the street penetrated only as far as the first row of tables. Bass paused a moment beyond that point, waiting for his eyes to adjust to the gloom. Beside him, gold-lettered titles gleamed up at him from a table-load of stacked, identical books. The many-times-repeated phrase caught his attention as he was about to move on: ". . . With Security and Abundance For All."

He stared at it incredulously. An identically-titled book was on sale in Glenbrook, had been for years; it was required reading in the schools. The binding was different, of course, and—he bent closer—the authors' names. That settled it: a coincidence. But—

He wavered and gave in. Common sense told him that every second of unnecessary delay was dangerous; but he couldn't leave that question unanswered behind him. He snatched up one of the volumes and shoved it, with some difficulty, into the wide pocket on the inside of his stolen cape.

Near the low doorway at the rear of the shop, another title gleamed at him from a shelf: POCKET ATLAS OF THE WORLD. His fingers twitched for it, but he shook his head and plunged on, through the curtain, into an unlighted back room.

The simplest decisions, he thought dizzily, as he groped his way between a table and a mass of piled books, seemed to have become unaccountably difficult. He had a curious disembodied feeling, and his mind kept drifting stubbornly off into fantasy: a swift glimpse of Gloria, flushed and beautiful; Dean Horrock's blunt, palsied fingers, tamping tobacco into his pipe; his father's heavy, black-browed face, seen more distinctly than he had remembered it for years.

He realized that his wound must be more serious than he had thought; and that, if this went on, his recapture was certain. But it didn't seem to matter.

HE WAS in a hallway, clearly enough—he had been following a wall in the same direction interminably—but he had no idea how he had got there or which way he ought to go next. His mind was lucid but still very detached; a cool, tenuous cloud of intelligence withdrawn into a corner of his skull; if it hadn't been for the knot of pain in his side, he would have been able to ignore his bodily sensations altogether.

He stopped in the darkness and tried to orient himself. Which way had he

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turned when he'd first got into the hallway? The knowledge simply wasn't there. Blankness, from the time he was halfway across the room behind the book shop until a few moments ago.

A new, fiercer spasm of pain. . . .

When he could think again, he pushed himself away from the wall and moved forward cautiously, hands outstretched. The first thing to do was to make sure he *was* in a corridor. He might have been walking around and around a room, endlessly following four walls that he couldn't distinguish from one.

Four steps, and his fingers touched another wall. He moved to the right, feeling his way. Three steps, and a moulding slid under his fingers. Beyond it was a narrow vertical opening, with a faint current of air breathing through it. He groped for the doorknob, found it.

Dim gray light from two windows struck his eyes when he opened the door. There were three small desks, their varnish glinting faintly; filing cabinets, swivel chairs, a curling glossy-paper calendar on the wall. There didn't seem to be any exit. Puzzled, he moved forward.

The gray light turned yellowish as he advanced until, a few paces from the windows, two incandescent globes rose into view. Street-lights. He was on the second floor; sometime during that blank period he must have stumbled onto a stairway and, senselessly, climbed it.

At any rate, he was on the right side of the building. Peering down warily from the side of a window, he could see that the street beneath was utterly deserted. A sheet of newspaper, turning and twisting like a live thing, swam halfway up across the face of the building opposite, then dived abruptly out of sight.

. . . Something was wrong. There was elusive, indefinable menace in what he saw—in the deserted street, or the vacant windows of the building across the way, or in the brooding, angular shapes of chimney-pots and wind-vanes dimly outlined against the sky.

Was that it, the sky? *How long had he been unconscious?*

He stared at it. No; it hadn't darkened perceptibly since he'd last seen it. His blackout, probably, had lasted only a few minutes—just long enough to reach the stairway, climb it, and wander a few yards down the second-floor corridor.

But his heart was thudding painfully against his ribs, moments later, as he descended the ink-black staircase toward the street.

He groped his way along the hall, through a cluttered back room, into a larger chamber and a glare of light from the street-lamps outside. Along two walls of the room stood rows of belt-driven machinery; in the center was a long, low table that bore rows and heaps and windrows of shoes.

Bass hesitated a moment, thinking, *I could easily find a pair to fit me, and it would be worth the delay, because*— But it wouldn't, he knew. If his face, or his gait or his physique didn't betray him, his shoes wouldn't. He was stalling deliberately, afraid to go out into that lighted, empty street.

Keeping in shadow as much as he could, he edged forward to the doorway. He stared through the grimy pane: Nothing. No one on the street in either direction, as far as he could see; no movement but the tumbling dance of paper scraps along the gutter. No one in the shadowed doorways across the street.

The brass doorknob was slick against his sweaty palm. He eased it around, opened the door inchmeal. Wind fluttered through the opening, bringing a muted echo of the noise from the next street. Grinding his teeth, Bass stepped out onto the sidewalk.

Nothing.

Nothing but fear, so thick he could almost taste it.

He was wounded, he told himself; wounded and tired and sick. That was the reason he felt like this, it had to be. And in any case, nothing could be more dangerous than going back, unless it was standing here like a fool, waiting for the

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Guard to come and find him.

He moved forward, one step, two, three. With each step the sense of danger grew stronger. In spite of himself he came to a halt, staring around him. The vacant, windy street—the darkened windows—above him, the broken silhouette of wind-vanes and chimney-pots. . . .

REALIZATION came, explosively. He saw those enigmatic shapes, not as they appeared now, half blotted out by the street lamps' glare, but as he had seen them from the window above. Cylinders, T-shapes, cubes—and a wide-angled, tapering V.

The blades of a copter!

In Glenbrook, no one was allowed to land a copter on a rooftop—no one except the Guard.

And if the Guard had had time to put a copter there, then there would be Guardsmen concealed on the street as well. . . .

The whole chain of reasoning occupied a fraction of a second; to Bass, there was no interval between the first step and the last. He whirled and leaped back toward the shelter of the doorway.

In the middle of that leap, Bass heard a shout: "*Get* it!"

As his foot struck the pavement, bedlam fountained behind him. The sharp, slapping echoes blended one explosion into the next to make one single marrow-shaking roar. Something slapped the pavement viciously to Bass's left; something else chewed a fan-shaped wad of splinters from the frame of the entranceway ahead. A round tiny hole, radiating hairline cracks, appeared low in the display window to the right.

Bass did not strictly speaking leap again; his momentum carried him forward over his leg's leverage. When he came down the second time, he was eight feet away from the recessed door.

And the door vanished behind a roiling cloud of gray-white gas that filled the entranceway brim-full. Tendrils of it curled off around the frame-edge, whipped by the wind—too slowly.

Bass rocked violently to a stop . . . stood hesitating for a moment during which something struck his right shoe a wrenching blow . . . and dived head-first through the cracked glass of the display window.

Footsteps echoed behind him down the lightless corridor.

Winded, staggering, the pain in his side stabbing him fiercely at every movement, Bass emerged from the book-shop doorway and hurled himself into the crowd again. Twice, in the first ten yards, he caught a glimpse of a scarlet uniform and had to angle off in a new direction. When he slowed down and let himself be carried along by the crowd's eddying movement, it was only because his overtaxed muscles refused to carry him any farther at a faster pace.

The character of the crowd had changed somehow, he realized vaguely; its blended shriek and roar were as raucous as ever, but under them was a muted, persistent humming. And here and there, isolated in the restless flow, were motionless clots of people with their heads bent together. He passed close to several of these groupings, and caught meaningless scraps of conversation that penetrated the uproar: ". . . pushed 'em with 'is . . ." "*Told* 'em I got to find my daughter . . ." ". . . call to be feared unless . . ."

The clots broke up and reformed, but always, it seemed to Bass, they grew larger and more frequent. He edged his way into one as it it grew into being around a large, self-important-looking man in a sky-blue cape. He heard:

"'S matter up there, man? What's happenin'?"

"Don't know n'more than you, friends. They're stoppin' ever'body at the corner—won't let nobody through."

"*Other* corner, too!" cried a gnomelike little man. "*Told* 'em I had to find my daughter, but they wouldn' . . ."

Bass turned back into the current, shaken. Either the Guard had acted more swiftly and efficiently after his escape than he would have believed possible, or

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his period of blankness had lasted just long enough to give them the time they needed. At any rate they had effectively trapped him, with a cordon at each end of the block, and—undoubtedly—men posted on each of the adjoining streets.

He saw another red uniform, and dodged deeper into the crowd. Their only problem now, he thought feverishly, was to dip the one fish they wanted out of the pool. They might bring up a hundred men, or two hundred, but only—how many? Four cars, with perhaps as many as six men in each. Only twenty-four Guardsmen, at most, had actually seen him, not counting the ones who had fired at him. a few minutes ago, across the full width of the street. . . . .

He stumbled, and, looking downward, saw that a long, curling strip of plastic had been ploughed up from the sole of his right shoe. He stooped painfully and tore it loose, knowing at the same instant that the action was futile. He could steal a complete set of new clothing, put on spectacles, somehow contrive a false mustache, alter his appearance completely . . . and still they would only have to look for a man with a gunshot wound.

Bass put his fingers tentatively to the warm stickiness at his side. Incredible that he had been shot . . . most of the red stain wiped off against his overshirt, but a little remained, buried in the grooves between the tiny ridges of his fingertips. . . . .

They still wanted him alive. That must be the reason they had done nothing until he had turned to run back into the building: they had wanted him to get far enough out into the street so that they could cut him off and capture him. And then, when they had fired, they had aimed low, at his legs. Another paradox: believing him to be a fiendishly powerful monster, the Guard treated him as if he were made of ordinary mortal flesh.

That, he thought dizzily, could be resolved by thinking of the Guard in two parts—the lower ranks, who were bound by superstition, and the high officials, who weren't—but it led immediately to still another: His knowledge made him dangerous, clearly, but it couldn't be of any interest in itself to the Guard or any other organ of the state. Unless—

Unless the two co-existing mercantile states were in competition, as one licensed craftsman might compete with another, and sometimes sent spies or troublemakers into each other's territory?

The notion of the Glenbrook Store competing with anyone made Bass's head swim, and yet he sensed dimly that it might explain a great many things—things that he had never before thought needed any explanation. The insistence on a high birth-rate, and the consequent overcrowding. The very structure of society itself, the Wall, the false stories of iron-fleshed demons. . . .

NOW he had to get out, he thought, with sudden, desperate clarity. If they recaptured him and took him to Guard headquarters, there would be no question of simply interrogating him and then killing him. They would want information about Glenbrook's espionage system, and they could not afford to believe that he didn't have it. They would keep him alive, and in pain, as long as they could.

"Commoners of Stamford, attention!" an enormous voice blared suddenly. Bass stopped, quivering. Around him he saw heads turn toward the invisible loudspeaker; the roar of the crowd began to diminish. *"Among you is a man who by accident has exceeded his capacity for alcohol. This man is temporarily beyond the control of his angel and is not responsible for his actions. I repeat, his condition is temporary. This man is* not *possessed, but he is dangerous to himself and others."*

A hum of interested, curious or dismayed voices arose, to subside as the loudspeaker bellowed: *"All persons in this block, between Dine and Kusko Streets, will move in an orderly manner toward the sound of my voice. You will each be examined individually by the*

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Guard, after which you will be free to continue the celebration."

The clamor of the mob burst forth again, more deafening than before; but the huge, packed mass slowly began to move down the street. Bass hung back until wide patches of confetti-strewn pavement began to appear behind him; then the crowd forced him to move.

His mind was spinning frantically, finding a grip nowhere. The fishermen were emptying their net; it would be a slow process, but infallible. There was no way he could escape it. In a few minutes, half an hour at most—

But why had the Guard told that clumsy lie? The question and the answer came almost simultaneously. Remembering the fat man in the Glenbrook Store, Bass thought: *They don't want to start a panic.*

There was no time to reason out his chances. Bass turned to the nearest citizen—a dropsical dull-eyed man with pendulous nose and lips—and blurted: "They're not telling the truth—they don't want to alarm us. There's a *demon* loose in the crowd!"

The man stared at him for a moment and said, "You're drunk, man. Forget it."

Bass said desperately, "Look!" Seizing the man's cape in one hand, with the other he flung his own cape open to show the blood-stained overshirt with its damning, plainly visible "GP."

The man pulled away calmly. His eyes, Bass saw now, barely focused: it was unlikely that he could see the overshirt, let alone the trademark on it.

He tried a woman, and then an acne-scarred boy, with the same result. The crowd moved on. Bass found himself near the loose-lipped man again. Suddenly inspired, he grasped the fellow's cape in both hands and swung him around to face him. "Y' drunk," said the man, and gurgled a parody of laughter.

"Listen," said Bass. "U/M products are no good. The Stockholders all have bad breath. The Executives eat dirt. The Salesmen—"

The man had staggered back, his eyes goggling in sudden sobriety. Halfway through Bass's third sentence, he violently wrenched himself free and darted with loud bellowings into the crowd.

Bass pushed his way a dozen steps to the right, seized a nervous-looking woman and repeated his blasphemy. Her shrieks were gratifyingly audible as she ran. By the time Bass found his fourth customer, the word had spread; he could hear it echoing shrilly from every side: *"A demon!"* The crowd was beginning to move faster.

Despairing of making himself heard any longer, Bass resorted to pinching everyone within reach. The crowd's forward motion accelerated to a fast walk, to a run, to a stampede.

He saw the wreckage of a wooden barricade, flanked by shouting, impotent Guardsmen, as the flood swept past the intersection.

In spite of the pulsing pain in his side, Bass kept up with a segment of the crowd that fled eastward, straight up the hill. Sirens were howling again, from every direction—the most beautiful sound he had ever heard, because it meant that his enemies no longer knew where to look for him.

But half a mile further on, the first dozen or so of the scattered crowd began to stream past him, running in the other direction as if salvation depended on it. Dropping out, Bass saw why.

At the crest of the hill was a barricade—a real one, this time, with swinging searchlights, massed cars and copters, and an army of men with bulky weapons.

VI

BASS stood with one shoulder against the rough clapboards of a house, half-supporting himself against it, and stared down the long slope at the lights of the city. Behind him, in the darkness, the rising wind howled through the dry hedge and under the eaves of the de-

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serted house. The air was chill on his sweaty skin, and his hurt side was one solid, throbbing pain from chest to groin but he did not move.

He had paralleled the barricade for eight blocks, all the way to the Wall. The Guard was there, too—one man every hundred and fifty yards, standing atop the Wall itself, with a searchlight aimed down into no man's land.

From where he stood he could see a part of that chain of light, tiny with distance. First came the street-lights of the residential area, dipping in precise converging lines to the cubical bulk of the Store. The top of the building was lost against the sky, but the doorways along its base, like the gaps between the teeth of a jack-o'-lantern, spilled wedges of orange radiance.

Beyond, clear and perfect, other rows of street lights marched up the gentle counter-slope. Then came the Guard's blinking search-beams, outlining the long catenary curve of the Wall; and beyond that Bass could see a wan glow rising from the other side.

The glow was Glenbrook. How often, Bass thought, had he looked at another ghostly light in the sky from the other side of that hill—the glow that was Stamford?

And how often, from the high ground, had he looked over on a clear day and seen the checker-work pattern that looked like rooftops—seen the shapes that looked like copters rising, the crawling dots that counterfeited trucks and buses, all the evidences of ordinary human activity—and seen them only as illusions?

He turned wearily and looked up the slope. Lights were there, too, a long straight line of them—tiny points blinking from the next hill. The line was nearer than it had been half an hour ago.

The Guard was working slowly westward across the city, searching each block in turn, moving the barricade up to the next street, searching again. They were being very slow, very careful. He had perhaps an hour and a half or two hours before they drove him down into the business section again.

The Store's bell had begun to toll half an hour ago; by now everyone in the city except Bass and the Guardsmen would be inside that enormous building. Once they had contracted their circle to the business area, the rest of their work would be easy.

He was going to die. That was a surprising thing, still; but his fatigue-numbed mind could accept it. The intolerable thing was that he couldn't strike back; he couldn't leave any memory of himself behind, even in the minds of his persecutors. Over there in Glenbrook there might be—there must be—others like himself. One after another, they might be thrust into the same grim comedy that he had been acting out; there was nothing he could do to prevent it. The Juggernaut would roll over him, erase him, and move on.

He thought of Consumers and Salesmen, Deacons and Deputies, Executives and Stockholders. He thought of the house he had grown up in—flimsy and rotten, because house-building took too many man-hours, was not profitable enough to the Store—crowded, because it was a sin to curb the size of Consumer families; the Store must have customers. He thought of his father, old at forty; of his mother, who had borne ten children before she died.

He thought of the scanty meals that had been set on their table, and the thin edge of hunger that was never quite worn away; because gluttony was a sin; because a Consumer didn't need fat, only muscle, to be an efficient worker; because there were too many mouths, and more every year.

All of it fell into one huge, simple pattern—the walls around men's cities, and the walls around their minds.

The pressure of the book in the pocket of his cape reminded him of the other book which he had not taken, though it would have been a hundred times more useful if he had got away—the atlas. He felt no curiosity about it now; he knew

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what he would have seen if he had opened it to the map of the continent.

LINE for line, area for area, the map would have been the same as the one he knew, except that the blank areas would have been filled in, and the filled-in ones blank. Like two parts of an interlocking puzzle, he thought: if you put the two maps together they would make one continuous chart of information, one solid, enormously comforting chart of a world totally inhabited, totally civilized, without fear.

That knowledge was the most important in the world—and there was no way you could communicate it. Even if he had got free of the Stamford Guard, nothing he could conceivably have done would have convinced a single other person of the truth.

If you kidnaped one person a day and *showed* him the truth, and if one out of a hundred, knowing the truth, could stand up against his angel—which was unlikely—and if each of those kidnaped one person a day in his turn . . . Bass groaned abruptly and tugged at his hair. There had to be a way; there had to be something he could still do.

Sneak into the Confirmation Rooms, sabotage the machines? They'd fly new ones in the next day, and how often could he do that before he was caught?

Break the Walls down, somehow . . . no use, the Walls were only a symbol; it was the angels that kept men from crossing over.

Bass started, and went over that thought again carefully. If that was true—and it was—why had the Walls been built of brick when boards would do?

For one thing, he realized; they were afraid of fires starting in the wasteland. It had happened already, or else the wasteland had been burnt deliberately, to prevent it. . . .

The wind was still rising. It pressed solidly against his back, flapped his cape and his trouser-cuffs around him.

. . . But the wasteland was too narrow now, he thought. A really big fire would jump the gap.

If a man, Bass asked himself slowly, stood facing that Wall, with an angel's fiery sword in front of him and a burning city behind—which way would he jump?

For an instant a heart-quickening vision rose up before him; then it vanished. There was just one thing wrong with it: the citizens of Stamford were all inside the massive, modern, fireproof Store, and would still be there, in all probability, an hour after Bass was dead. . . .

Bass lurched through the doorway of the empty filling station, caught himself by grasping the edge of a desk, and let himself slide down into its shadow. He sat there, head down, until his laboring breath began to come more evenly. It had taken him what seemed like almost an hour, running when he could, forcing his stiff muscles into a fast walk when he couldn't, to find this place.

It was hard to get up again, but he did it. He picked up the phone, pressed the stud marked "Operator," and waited, trying to control his breathing.

"Operator," said a woman's voice.

Bass said, "Get me Guard Headquarters."

"Your credit card number, please."

"This is an emergency call," Bass said. "Put it through, Operator."

"*Yes,* sir."

A pause; a hum. Then: "Guard H. Q., Sergeant Santos. Go ahead."

Bass took a deep breath. "Listen to me carefully," he said. "I'm the demon you're looking for. I've—"

The Guardsman's voice blurted something incomprehensible, tremulously.

"Listen, you fool!" Bass said sharply. "*I've planted an explosive device in the Store.* It's set to go off exactly thirty minutes from now. If you agree to let me go back across the Wall, I'll tell you where it is. Tell your—"

Another voice broke in. "What's that? Say that again."

Bass repeated it. He finished, "It will take me ten minutes to get to another

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telephone. At the end of that time, if I see that you're withdrawing your men from the Wall, I'll tell you where the explosive is hidden. If not, you won't hear from me again." He put down the phone, cutting off the man's voice in mid-syllable.

OUTSIDE, he picked up the five-gallon can he had filled at the pump. The wind was still growing, roaring down to meet him as he climbed the hill again. A ruder gust came as he reached the crest, nearly knocking him off his feet; his hat lifted from his head and went bounding away into darkness.

Back at his starting point, Bass set the can down—its weight had grown fantastically with every step he took—and leaned against a tree until the worst of his weakness and nausea passed.

To the east, the winking lights of the advancing barricade had vanished; the Guardsmen were out of sight in the hollow between the two hills. In the other direction, as he watched, the lights along the Wall began to blink out. Bass turned his attention to the orange wedges of light that spilled from the doorways of the Store.

After a moment, they began to flicker.

The Guardsmen were falling back from the Wall—no doubt to form another, less conspicuous line a block or two away—but they were also evacuating the Store.

Bass lifted the can and carried it into the nearest house. In the darkness, he felt his way around the crouching bulks of tables, the spidery traps of tubular-metal chairs; passed through a doorway and went straight to the huge wardrobe closet, crammed with dresses, capes, trousers, so tightly pressed that they were like one solid mass. He pulled out an armload of them, carried them back into the living room, heaped them against an inner wall. He splashed them sparingly with gasoline from the can.

Before he left, he raised a window in the front room and another in the kitchen, and propped open the door between.

At the next house but one he did the same, and so on down the deserted street, working his way southward, until his gasoline was gone. He stood panting raggedly in the living room of the last one; it had taken him a long time, and he had not dared stop to rest. By now more than half of the congregation would be outside the Store, spreading out, filling the streets. There was little time left.

He struck a match from the box he'd found in the kitchen, dropped it onto the piled garments, watched them flare up. He waited until he was sure the flame had caught, then hurried out, down the street, into the next house with an open window. Another match; another pale blossom of fire.

When he came out of the eighth house, he saw a golden tongue of flame rise over the rooftops, down the way he had come.

Coming out of the fourteenth, he heard the faint wail of a siren; then another. Too soon! He had hoped that the choked streets would delay them longer.

He ran on grimly, the pavement jolting his body from feet to skull, breath burning his throat—into a house, lighting the match, dropping it, out again without waiting to see that it caught, on to the next.

Three-quarters of the way back to his starting-point, the matches gave out. Bass groped wildly in the dark kitchen for another box, gave it up, snatched the book out of the pocket in his cape, wrenched out a handful of pages before he realized that he could never keep them alight in the gale outside—dropped them and the remainder of the book, mumbling absurdly, *"Now I'll never know if it's the same text"*—plucked a blazing, gasoline-soaked vest out of the fire and ran with it down to the next house.

It worked, but it delayed him. When he came out of the last house, the sirens were very near. Also, a copter was parked in the middle of the street. Two red-masked men were climbing out of it, running toward him.

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VII

BASS whirled and ran back into the house, past the flames that were beginning to curl up the wall, through the dark kitchen. Footsteps pounded after him.

He burst through the outside door, crossed the yard in three strides, and heard the door slam again as he leaped the hedge into the yard behind. He swerved to the right, barely avoiding a child's wagon that lay upturned on the ground, then forward again into the deep shadow along the side of the next house. Behind him he heard a crash and an explosive curse.

Chest straining, Bass reached the front of the house, turned left to the door, opened and closed it soundlessly after him. The desperate energy of the last few moments was already fading; he knew he was no match for anyone in an open chase. He mounted the dark stairs, keeping close to the bannister. He paused at the top, listened, heard nothing but the wild pounding of his own heart.

Light flared in the room below an instant after he stepped away from the landing.

They knew he was in the house. One of them must have circled it the other way, and they had met in front. . . .

Footsteps thudded faintly in the rooms below; he heard a door open and shut directly below him, then another farther away.

Bass took off his shoes. Carrying them, he moved cautiously into the front bedroom and closed the door. He put the shoes under the bed. The left-hand window was stuck, and he dared not force it. He pushed carefully at the other one, forcing it up a fraction of an inch at a time, dreading the shriek of wood on wood. Finally the space was high enough to let him out.

He looked down at the empty yard, then sat on the windowsill and swung his legs over.

Below him the door slammed and a red-uniformed man stepped out onto the walk. He glanced up, nodded, and said into the instrument in his hand, "He's here, Harry. In the second-floor front."

Bass, with his legs half drawn inside the window again, heard brisk footsteps crossing the room below.

"Stay where y'are," the man outside said pleasantly.

Desperately, Bass glanced up. The roof was just above him, an iron-gray blur against the sky. He gathered his legs under him, eased his head and shoulders out and stood up precariously, facing the house, fingers gripping the underside of the raised window.

He shifted one hand to the top of the sash, leaned backward and reached up with his free hand. His fingers closed over the rough, dry edges of the shingles. He gripped them convulsively, brought up his other hand to catch the roof, and swung out into space.

"Hurry it," said the man below, urgently. Inside, the bedroom door was flung open with a crash.

With a lurch that nearly tore loose his grip on the roof-edge, Bass got one stockinged foot over the top, then his knee.

"Hell," said the man below. There was a *ping*, and something shattered against the house-wall under Bass's head. White vapor swirled around his face for an instant, blinding him; then the wind had whirled it away. Suddenly dizzy, with a gigantic effort he hoisted himself up and over.

He was lying halfway down the shallow pitch of the roof; it was rolling vertiginously under him, and he felt as if he were going to be sick again.

A voice drifted up to him: "Gas didn' work, too much wind, Harry. Better go up after him."

A hand appeared on the roof-edge, then another. Bass flung himself at them dizzily, seized the fingers, pried them away from the room.

"Look out below," said a resigned voice; then the fingers disappeared. Bass heard a thud.

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He stood up carefully, hair flying in the wind, bending his knees to keep his balance on the slope. Across the ridge of the roof, the sky was one gigantic gold-and-pink glare.

In the other direction was the roof of the adjoining house. The gap between the two looked to be no more than four feet.

"Bass," called a voice. One of the Guardsmen had backed into view down the lawn. "C'mon down, boy. We won't hurt you."

Bass moved down to the edge of the roof. Another gas-capsule burst at his feet, but the vapor whipped away instantly. He gathered himself and leaped across, clutching frantically as he landed to keep from slipping off the edge. He scrambled up again with his palms full of splinters and climbed to the ridge.

ONE Guardsman, limping, was heading around the corner of the first house; the other was still on the front lawn. Bass turned, straddling the center line, and moved back until he was out of sight from either direction before he clambered down the opposite slope.

One of the Guardsmen was standing between the houses, looking up at him. "Be reasonable, will ya?" he said.

Bass jumped across to the next roof. It was harder to keep from sliding off this time, and harder to get up, but he managed it. He was very tired, and his mind was sluggish, but he knew they would never catch him. He would keep on walking across these roofs forever, if necessary, and by that time the whole city would have burned down. Then they would have to go away and leave him alone.

Here he was at the ridge again.

"Bass," called the Guardsman's voice from somewhere to his left. "Lissen to me, Bass! Can ya hear me? It's important, Bass! Lissen, we'll make a deal with ya—you come down, and we'll leave ya family alone! Y'understand?"

His family . . . Bass's mind snapped into clarity for a moment. How did they know who his family was? *How did they know his name?* Bewildered, he turned and walked a few steps toward the front of the house.

. . . But how did he know the Guard would keep its word to a "demon"? And anyhow, curse it, these weren't Glenbrook Guardsmen. It didn't make any sense. If they were *Stamford* Guardsmen, how could they hurt his family in Glenbrook? And if they weren't, how did they know his—

Too late, he heard the roaring swell up behind him and felt the wind suddenly blowing straight down along his body. Flailing his arms desperately to keep his balance, he turned to see a metal-and-glass monster looming over him—a copter, its undercarriage almost brushing the ridge.

He had just time to see the head framed in the open doorway, the white hair whipping wildly, orange-tinted in the glare. The face, contorted in a fearful scowl, was that of His Excellency, the Archdeputy Laudermilk.

"Hang on!" shouted the old man.

Then the undercarriage touched Bass's chest; he clutched it automatically as he felt himself being shoved backwards; and then he was dangling while the roof moved out from under him and the street gently rose.

When his feet touched, the Guardsman was there to seize his arms and hustle him into the copter's open doorway. Bass made no resistance.

Someone closed the door and pushed him into a seat, and the copter rose again.

"Now," said Laudermilk severely, "do you see how much trouble you've caused?"

Bass stared down through the copter's transparent wall. They were cruising high over Stamford's business district; he could see the fire from one end to the other. It stretched in a blazing arc halfway down the slope, the flames shooting forward at an acute angle, five times the height of the buildings, sparks fountaining upward as if from a battery

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of titanic Roman candles. But it had not reached the Wall at either end.

At the west end, the nearer one, Bass could see that the streets were clogged by streams of cars and people moving out of the danger area. Here and there, clumps of tiny green fire-engines were playing threads of water against the buildings in the fire's path.

Bass could not see much of what was going on in the center, there was too much smoke. But he saw the white clouds that came billowing up out of the sepia: first one, then two together, then a whole row. Buildings were being dynamited to clear a firebreak.

That in itself, it occurred to Bass, must mean that most of the crowds had been evacuated already.

"The people in Glenbrook," he said bitterly, "will see the red light and the smoke, and hear the explosions, and tell each other the demons are having a party."

"Yes," Laudermilk agreed, "and the Stamford people will think the demons in Glenbrook caused the fire. What did you expect?"

"It doesn't matter what I expected," Bass said.

"No, it doesn't, unfortunately. You see, Arthur, it wouldn't have done any good even if you had succeeded . . . yes, I know what you wanted to do. You wanted to drive the two peoples together, and make them see the truth about each other. As it is, I'm afraid you've only managed to remind the authorities once more what a dangerous thing a possessed man can be . . . and you've killed a few people, no doubt, not to speak of the property damage."

"I'm not sorry I did it," said Bass.

"No, neither am I, as a matter of fact," Laudermilk said good-humoredly. "If you hadn't, we might never have found you. That would have been a great pity."

HE WASN'T making sense, Bass thought confusedly. They'd had him surrounded—his setting the fire had only helped them capture him a little sooner, that was all.

"Are you wounded?" Laudermilk asked abruptly. Fingers probed under his shirts, rolling them back, turning him gently to examine the other side. "That's not too bad—it went straight through. Hold still." Something cool and gelatinous was smeared over the painful area; then an adhesive bandage, tight around his ribs.

"But don't you suppose," Laudermilk said, "that there have been catastrophes in the world before this? Not only local fires, but real catastrophes, that dislocated millions of people at a time. The great Missouri flood, for example, in 2097. The G.P.'s and the U.M.'s were mingled then, so thoroughly that it took five months to get them all sorted out. Or the powerplant explosion in the Urals in 2081. The Obprods and the Luchuvels both shot a great many of their own people then—there was a great stench about it in the World Court afterwards—but it really wasn't at all necessary."

Bass stared at him. "Why not?" he demanded.

"Because people looked at each other, and saw what they had been taught to see, plus a good deal that they made up themselves on the spot. And the stories grew in the telling. In Kentucky, for example, they don't say that the Others have bat wings and fingers like pitchforks, or anything so tame and ordinary as that . . . they say that the Others are fifty feet tall, with heads that are all bones and teeth, and that worms crawl in and out of their eyes."

Bass put his head in his hands.

"We'd better move along now, Davy," Laudermilk said to the pilot. "We're very late."

"Right."

Bass felt the copter shudder and dip as the vanes were retracted; then the jets fired, the back-rest shoved hard against him, and the landscape below began to unreel majestically, carrying the fire, and Stamford, and all the scurrying little people in it out of sight.

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"No," said Laudermilk, "what you did was justified only because it helped us find you before the Stamford Guard did. And at that, Arthur, I doubt if you can appreciate now what a difficult situation you put us in. I had to disrupt my schedule with a very flimsy excuse, which will take weeks of work to cover up—and then when we did locate you, of course, we had to broadcast misdirections to the Stamford Guard units in order to give ourselves time to work. The consequences of that could be very serious indeed. You can consider yourself very fortunate, young man, that you're as valuable to us as you are. I mean by that, of course, your genes. Yes. A very important strain. We thought it was lost."

Bass chose one question at random out of the dozens that were crowding his mind. "Where are you taking me?"

"To Pasadena, Arthur."

"Why?"

"To enroll you in the College. Not as Arthur Bass, of course—you've spoilt that name, I'm afraid. How would you like to be called Martyn? That's an old and honorable name. Arthur Martyn. Yes. Rather too euphonious, if anything, but if you don't mind—"

The submersible organ, whatever it was, that had choked Bass during his first interview with Laudermilk, was throttling him again now. "I don't understand," he managed.

"Arthur," said the old man gently, "the people at the College are all like us—all sane. Faculty and students. There isn't an angel-ridden person among them."

Bass clutched the seat-arms fiercely, as if to make sure they were still there.

"Then," he said desperately, "you mean that if I'd stayed in Glenbrook—and not talked to anybody, or anything—"

"Yes," said Laudermilk. "I'm afraid I must take the blame for that, Arthur. When I gave you the test this afternoon, your response was so well-acted that I wasn't sure of you. And I assumed—that was my error—that if you were acting, then your father must have told you about yourself, taught you to counterfeit the angel-reaction. He would have done so, of course, if he had lived. He was one of us, you know; so was your mother. I've checked the available records; there's no doubt of it."

Bass gaped at him. All at once things he had half-forgotten were coming back into focus. That book in his father's study; a way both his parents had of looking at him sometimes, as if they knew a delightful secret that they mustn't tell him just yet . . . and he had never, he realized abruptly, seen his angel outside the house they lived in. "I never had an angel at all," he said aloud.

"No. Your parents, I rather think, persuaded you that you had by using a training film in darkened rooms—very difficult, and risky, but there's no other way—people like us can't be hypnotized. They kept you away from the cinema, I suppose, so that you wouldn't realize you were being tricked."

"I never saw a movie until I was ten."

"Yes. You see, Arthur, twenty years ago we weren't as well organized as we are now—we could neither support any great part of our numbers in hiding, as we do now in the College and other places, nor could we protect them adequately among ordinary people. So a great many of us—your parents included—had to sever their connections with us completely, and live just as if they were ordinary, orthodox citizens. We're making up for that now—we're gathering in their children.

"You see, those who pass the test I gave you are sent on to the College, where they're given more thorough tests, and if they pass those, somehow or other they always fail their scholastic examinations, and we send them home. On the other hand, those who fail the first test are the ones we're really after. We put them under immediate confinement, so they can't betray themselves, ship them off to the College—and they

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stay. That was what I should have done with you."

"But I still don't understand," said Bass. "You control the College of Religious Sciences—that must mean the Deacons are all your people—"

"Not all," the Archdeputy corrected him. "Only a little more than thirty percent, and it's taken us a long time to get that far. In another fifty years we'll have complete control of the analogue machines—that's their proper name, by the way—and something like half the Executive group will be our people, and perhaps thirty or forty percent of the Guard—like the two gentlemen who helped me coax you down off that roof."

"And then," said Bass, "you'll stop all this—this—"

"Tyranny is the word, Arthur. It isn't in any of the dictionaries you've seen, but you'll learn it at the College, along with a lot of other old words. Politics. Democracy. Freedom . . . but the answer to your question is no. I'll explain why, but first let me ask you a question. If we could somehow take Dean Horrock's angel away from him tomorrow, would he be able to go on doing his job?"

"No. He wants to kill people."

"Exactly. The group that you belong to now, Arthur, differs from the rest of the world's population in two ways, not one. We're immune to all forms of psychic compulsion—we owe that to a mutation—and we're *sane*. That's another word you'll learn: the Mercantile jargon for it is 'inherently stable.'

"Now do you begin to see? The analogue treatment was originally developed as a control for dangerously unstable persons—like your Dean. It worked so well that in the hundred and fifty years since then, mental instability has become the norm . . . we can't get adequate figures, but we have good reason to believe that three people out of ten would be hopelessly insane without their 'angels.'

"So all we can do is increase our own numbers as fast as we can, protect ourselves, consolidate our position, and try to keep the Mercantile system from smashing itself apart before we're ready to take over. You know, there are some things even an 'angel' can't do. It can't keep a District Executive from making an irrational decision, for instance. You recall the protein-concentrate shortage last year? The man who made that mistake was replaced, naturally, but the man who replaced him isn't much better. The angels can't do anything about catatonia or epilepsy, either. More than three-quarters of the cases of 'possession' you hear about aren't people like ourselves being caught, but normal people, so-called, collapsing into insanity.

"The world our descendants will build eventually will be a good one, Arthur—no more hypnotism, in the analogue rooms or on the air or in the papers . . . and, I think, little insanity of any kind. But when the crash comes, it isn't going to be pretty—that reminds me. I meant to show you these." He handed Bass a half-dozen photographs.

Bass examined them; they were not scenes of disaster, but pictures of girls about his own age. "Pretty" was evidently the word that had made Laudermilk think of them.

"Some of your fellow-students. All unmarried, so far. You have no objection to marriage, have you, Arthur?"

Bass was staring at the picture of a slender girl with smooth dark hair; there was something intriguing about her smile and the way she stood. For an instant Gloria Andresson's image rose up in his mind, looking oddly overfleshed and stupid; then it vanished. "No," he said abstractedly.

"Or children? But that comes a little later; I mustn't rush you. Well. I'm going to catch a few winks of sleep now, I believe; it's been a busy day." He tilted his seat back and closed his eyes. In repose, his face fell into tired lines, but there was the suggestion of a benign smile among the wrinkles.

The plane droned on, past a final tendril of cloud, into the depthless night and the stars. • • •

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The pills were supposed to make the athletes perform wonders—not miracles. . . .

TROUBLE at the training table

By LEE PRIESTLEY

I DON'T care what those high altitude athletes are spreading; I am *not* a mad scientist.

Never have I strapped a screaming victim to an operating table in a chrome-plated laboratory and grafted six extra legs while laughing diabolically. You could hardly call the hog lots and the barrel and spade I mix the feedings with a laboratory. And I'm not laughing.

Ask anybody if I'm not one of the best hog feeders in the business. Check with my bankers or find out what they think of my methods at the Animal Nutrition Lab and the Experiment Stations. I've got three degrees from good universities and, up to now, the whole state would tell you Hiriam Hadsell knew what's what in the hig feed-out business.

Outside of hogs, I go for athletics. Being the light bacon type myself instead of the heavy lard, I never earned a letter but I keep in touch. When I went back to the old school for Homecoming, Berny Barton, the head coach and my old roomie, was crying into two towels. That's after Mid-West U

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smeared us 50-0 with the stadium packed.

"I got to do something," Berny sobs. "Even before this the win-jammers is breathing down my neck. Hi, I *gotta* win the next two."

"You've got too many light weights in the line, Berny."

"You can say that twice. I spend training table money like it was Uncle Sam's. My lugs got steak and spinach running out their ers, but I can't put a pound of suet on a single one of them."

Why I have to open my mouth then I'll never know. Even my best friends will tell you I'm a nickel nurser and who should know better than a hog finisher how feed bills mount up?

But I tell Berny, "I'll bet I can put some weight on those guys. Let me run their training table a while. I've got on to something big in the feed lots and I don't think there's much difference in feeding a pig and a pigskin lugger."

"What do you mean you're on to something?" Berny asks.

He won't know what I'm talking about. Berny flunked out first semester Freshman year and later graduated from the College of Cauliflower Ears. But I explained. "I've been experimenting. I fed two pens of sows, one a diet low in Vitamin E, the other a diet high in same. On the diet deficient in Vitamin E the sows didn't reproduce. On the diet high in E they had good litters. You see, Vitamin E is the anti-sterility vitamin."

"Vitamins? Anti-sterility?" Berny is trying to keep up. "Look, why should I care if a bunch of pigs do or don't become mamas?"

"Keep listening," I say. "Here's the catch. On that low vitamin E diet—a special food I mixed up—those sows grew long legs and gained twenty pounds apiece in a week."

"What's it to me if some pigs make hogs outa theirselves?"

"Listen some more. I fed those fast growing hogs a special food . . . cornstarch, casein, a mix of minerals and hormones, brewers' yeast, pure Vitamin A and D. Then just for the heck of it, I threw in some colchicine."

"Calcimine?" Berny says. "The stuff you paint on walls and it runs down your elbows?"

"Not calcimine. Colchicine. Back in 1937 Blakeslee and Avery found out you could double the number of chromosomes in plants by treating them with colchicine, which is an alkaloid drug. They got mutations. New, and queer flowers, giant forms—"

"I never wanted no queers," Berny says firmly. "No flowers, neither. Giants I'll take."

"That pen of sows grew like the government debt. They gained more than twice the average amount under ideal conditions. Now I've concentrated that special food until it's a brownish-yellow powder you can add to any food. I guess you could call it a thyro-protein. I know it has thyroxine, the thyroid gland substance that regulates growth, for I get that by synthesis when I treat the casein with iodine. Anyhow, it's potent. Let me feed a little of this mix to your boys and I'll put on twenty pounds per man in a week's time."

Berny is glowing like a neon sign. "You put ten pounds on the line and I'll personally deed you a half interest in this knowledge trap!"

IT WAS easy. I used the same formula I'd used on the pigs and put them under sun lamps. Actually I think I was mixing holophytic and holozoic nutrition types, the systems for plants and the systems for animals. A few tablespoons of this powder and the line got as heavy on your lap as a blonde you're getting tired of.

So Berny won his two games. I got a buzz out of cheering the old school on to victory, and the gridiron season was over. I went back home to my regular pigs.

But Berny couldn't be satisfied with one success. So—the first day the high altitude athletes turn out for basket-

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ball, Berny turns up in the little shed beside the feeder pens where I mix the feedings.

"Look, Hi," he says. "I'm in a jam. You gotta help me out, kid."

"The boys losing the pounds I put on them? It probably isn't permanent weight unless you keep up the special mixture. And that stuff's expensive."

Berny shrugged his beefy shoulders. "I should worry about football until time for spring training. All them lugs got to do is hit the books a little and catch up their sleep. It's my hoopsters I got troubles with now. We put a mortgage on the Administration Building to sign a couple six-foot-eight-inch players and now Mid-West comes up with three men that are six-foot-ten! So I want you should dose up the basketball training table with some of that growing powder."

"You don't want weight on your hoop men."

"Nah, nah, I need inches on those babies, not pounds. But that powder you fed the line made them grow a little bit taller, too. Can't you hep it up for height?"

I should have said "No" in twelve languages including the Scandinavian. I've said before that I like to experiment. Wanting to know what will happen is the itch for which there is no scratch. And it seemed simple enough.

Any feeder knows the critters will grow like weeds in an old pig pen if you give plenty of riboflavin—that's vitamin B_2. You can feed it straight, but in human nutrition it's a fact that you assimilate nearly as much from feedings of milk and ice cream as from the pure vitamin. You can get good amounts from feeding green peas and almonds, too. So I added those four foods in quantity and gave the boys a few spoonfuls of the growth powder in supplementary amounts.

The basketball team began to grow all right. But the inches didn't add up as fast as the pounds had. Not at first anyway. When the boys hung at six feet, nine inches, Berny got impatient.

I'd gone home to mix up a new batch of the growth powder in the shed beside the feeder pens where I kept the supplies of vitamins and chemicals and stuff. When I looked up Berny was leaning against the door casing.

"Say, kid, can't you rev it up? Give the boys a double dose? Gee, you put pounds on the linesmen in half this time." Berny's face sagged like a hammock in late August. "We got to play Mid-West U next week and those three bums top my best boys a whole inch."

I stirred the mixture in the barrel with the spade and tried to explain it to Berny. "It's not the same thing as putting on weight. I have to feel out the way. It's chancy. I'm giving the boys thyroxine now." I showed Berny the bottle I'd just set back on the shelf. "Fellows as tall as those boys of yours were, are in a state of glandular imbalance to begin with. Then when we feed them more glandular extracts, it's like throwing gasoline on a fire. You got to be careful you don't burn down the joint. See?"

BERNY hadn't listened. "You've been griping about the training table expense. Now I'll personally pay you back for all the calcimine and vitamin alphabets you use. I gotta get them centers to six eleven before Saturday night!"

"Not calsomine; colchicine," I corrected him. "Like I've been saying, Berny, the expense isn't all of it. Anyway I have plenty of stuff on hand." I showed him the shelf where I'd racked up the A and D, the B_2, the E, the colchicine, the hormones and the gland extracts I'd used in the anti-sterility experiment that got me into this. "You got to go easy, or you'll have some ten footers on your hands."

"Happy day!" Berny sighed. "If they'd touch ten feet, we'd sweep the conference!"

There wasn't any use talking to him. Berny would use his own grandmother for a tackling dummy if it would put him

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in the win column.

Berny cocked his head on one side and listened. "Hey, is your phone ringing in the house? Yeah, it is. You'd better go answer it. Might be important."

There wasn't anyone on the line when I got there, so I went back to the mixing shed. Berny was lounging against the barrel when I went in.

"Well, I'll be getting back, Hi." he said, straightening up. "You keep on feeding the team the way you think best and I'll have to be satisfied, I guess."

Right away we ran into trouble. The team ate well, but they started to have upset stomachs. Every morning they had a touch of nausea. But that didn't stop their growth. Six, ten . . . six, eleven . . . an even seven feet . . . seven, one . . . seven, two . . .

Berny was tickled to death, but I cut off the growth powder. I didn't want to build real giants; they might turn out to be Hiriam killers.

Then we began to get finicky appetites. The team wanted to eat dill pickles for breakfast and broiled lobster in the middle of the night. But that could have been because they weren't sleeping well on the dormitory floor. They had all grown out of their beds. Seven, three . . . seven, four . . . seven, five. . . .

Of course they won all their games, so Berny didn't lose any sleep. But I did. One night I punched the pillow for hours after I went to bed. I couldn't think how I could reverse things. I'd stopped giving the growth powder when I used up the batch I'd been mixing when Berny tried to persuade me to "rev it up." Somehow I had done just that, but I couldn't figure—

I heard the noise again. I got out of bed and pawed for my shoes and a flash. In the moonlight I saw a shadowy movement at the mixing shed door. I sprinted across the grass and then crept up to the dark doorway.

Whoever was inside moved then, and fell over the mixing spade. A grunt and some cuss words were punctuated with the tinkle of broken glass. I aimed the flash at the racket.

Berny was trying to shake something out of an empty bottle into a bucket he was holding. I twisted the bottle out of his hand and saw that it had contained vitamin E, the anti-sterility one. All the other bottles on the shelf were empty too, or nearly so. Berny had dumped everything into the last batch of growth powder I'd fed the team! He admitted it when I threatened him with the spade. He was trying to get a little more to take with them to the tournaments.

When the secondary sex characteristics got more . . . characteristic, I was sure, but I kept watching the team. They began to get a little paunchy, too. Then I started looking up stuff in my zoology books. Stuff like "oögenesis; the development of ova from primitive sex cells" and "Parthenogenesis: the development of an egg which has not united with a male gamete."

Not even Berny knew what kind of vitamin-hormone-colchicine mess he'd fed the team, but it was potent. Especially that anti-sterility vitamin.

You'll be seeing Berny and me either in jail or in the medical journals. Because the high altitude athletes are all going to be mamas.

Coming Next Issue

CONQUEST OF JANES

A Mirth-Packed Novelet of Interplanetary Frauds and Follies

By R. J. McGREGOR

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"Kill!" cried Robert, "Kill the living thing!"

ROBERT

By EVAN HUNTER

THE salesman was a most presentable young man, with a grey tweed suit, and a neat brown mustache. Eddie listened to what he said, and he glanced occasionally at Mary to see if she shared his interest.

"You've got to understand," the salesman was saying, "that you aren't the first childless couple to make use of our service. As a matter of fact, I could name people in your own neighborhood who have done just what you're about to do and are—"

"We didn't say we were going to do it," Eddie reminded him.

"Of course, Mr. Stevens, I understand that. I think, however, and you'll forgive my frankness, you would be foolish

He was a model child. In fact, he'd been made to order. . . .

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not to do it."

Mary nodded in agreement, her brows puckered together. "You said we could choose the color of hair and eyes, is that right?"

"Exactly," the salesman smiled ingratiatingly. "A nice combination, considering your own coloring, would be blond hair and brown eyes. That's entirely up to you, of course."

"And the complexion?" Eddie asked.

"We will match your own complexion, or give you whatever skin pigmentation you prefer. You've got to remember that we're only trying to please you. This is one of the advantages over the . . . uh . . . normal procedure. You get a choice here."

"It does sound good," Mary said.

"I don't know," Eddie said dubiously.

"It really does grow?" Mary asked the salesman. "Just like a real one?"

"That's an exclusive feature with our firm, Mrs. Stevens. That's one of the reasons our model is so popular. We give it to you in a state of development comparable to the first week of life. It grows automatically, the metal treated to expand so many inches over so many years. Of course, the plastic is pliable and it stretches to accommodate the metal. The facial features change too, over the years."

"And this is all included in the initial purchase price?" Eddie asked.

"Precisely."

"How . . . how tall does it get?" Mary asked.

"That again is up to you. Most people choose six feet or so for a boy, and about five-six for a girl."

"We'd want a boy," Eddie said quickly.

"Yes," Mary agreed.

The salesman chuckled a little and said, "Well, there's no guess work involved here. You can have a boy this time, and a girl next time, if you like."

"We want a boy," Eddie said.

"Then a boy it will be. Shall we take down the other specifications?"

"Well. . . ." Mary said.

"What about . . . about his character?" Eddie asked. "I mean. . . ."

"That's the beautiful part of it. You get the machine with a clean mind. There are banks upon banks of memory tapes inside, all tied in with the delicate mechanism of the brain. In other words, it learns only what you want it to learn. It's a beautiful instrument, believe me. You couldn't tell it from the real thing."

"You're sure?"

"I beg your pardon?"

"About . . . about telling it from the real thing? I mean—will our neighbors knows it's a robot, and not a real baby?"

The salesman laughed out loud. "Mr. Stevens, if I told you how many of your neighbors had robots instead of babies, you wouldn't believe me. It's the coming thing, take my word. Why even couples who can have children are buying our model instead. Rather than go through the mess and the uncertainty, you understand. Believe me, you won't be alone."

Eddie glanced uncertainly at Mary. She took her full lower lip between her teeth and nibbled at it. Then she nodded her head.

"All right," said Eddie.

"Fine, fine."

The salesman took a contract from his pocket and began unscrewing the lid of his fountain pen. "Now, let's see. Color of hair . . . !"

The baby was delivered as promised in less than two weeks.

It looked quite lifelike, and Eddie and Mary were very happy to have it. It didn't cry at first, but Eddie quickly corrected this, by feeding the proper information to the memory tapes. The baby learned instantly, setting up a most human howl whenever it was disturbed by anything.

"We'll have to be careful," Mary said.

"How do you mean?"

"Well, about the things we give to the memory tapes. It would look funny for the baby to be talking at six months old, don't you think?"

Eddie grinned and wiped a hand over his mouth. "Yeah. I hadn't thought of that."

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"Do you think the neighbors suspect?"

"Nope."

"How do you know?"

"Well, they just didn't seem surprised, that's all."

"But I . . . I didn't look very . . . pregnant."

"I know. They still didn't seem surprised. Don't ask me. Let's let well enough alone."

Mary looked down at the still form of the baby in the crib. "Will . . . will it be all right, Eddie?"

"Oh, sure."

"I mean . . . will we get to love it? It's . . . it's just a machine, you know."

"We'll get to love it," Eddie said solemnly.

"You really think so?"

"I really think so."

MR. JEFFRIES next door was a hell of a nice guy. At least, he was tops in Eddie's book. When he heard about the baby, he invited Eddie in and offered him a glass of port.

"There's nothing like it, Eddie," he said. "Nothing like it. You'll see. You'll love it."

"I love it already," Eddie said.

"Yes, but wait until it becomes a real person."

For a moment, Eddie's lip began to tremble. "Wh—what?"

"You know, when he begins to walk and talk and laugh. That's when you really begin enjoying 'em. Up to then, heck, they're just cute little packages, that's all."

"I guess so," Eddie said, immensely relieved.

Mr. Jeffries smiled knowingly. "What are you going to name the little rascal?" he asked.

"Robert," Eddie replied quickly.

"Robert," Mr. Jeffries repeated. "That's a nice name. Robert."

"My father's name," Eddie said, "Lord rest his soul."

"A very nice name," Mr. Jeffries repeated.

Eddie finished the port. "Well, I've got to get back. Mary's holding the fort all by herself."

Mr. Jeffries smiled. "It'll be easier when he grows up, Eddie. You'll see what I mean."

He hurried home to Mary.

Eddie learned one thing that worried him for a little while.

He could tell that Robert was a robot.

He didn't discover it until Robert was almost five years old. Up until that time, he thought it was an ordinary twinkle in the boy's eyes. But one day, he was sitting on the sofa reading a book when he glanced up and saw his son watching him.

"What is it?" he asked.

"Nothing, Dad. I was just thinking, that's all."

The voice coming from Robert's lips had been perfectly adjusted so that it corresponded to the chronological age of the machine. Eddie never thought of it as a machine anymore, of course. This was his son, an intelligent, warm, good-looking boy who, Eddie felt, rather favored his father.

"Thinking about what, son?"

"Oh, lots of things."

Eddie shrugged. And then he saw the flicker of light behind Robert's right eye. He stared at the boy for a moment.

"Come here, son," he said.

Robert got to his feet obediently and moved closer to his father. Eddie studied him closely. The flicker was nothing more than that: an occasional twinkle of light far behind the boy's right eye. Undoubtedly a tube, Eddie thought, and he surprised himself with the knowledge that he still knew the boy was a robot.

What is it, Dad?" the boy asked.

Eddie didn't want to worry him unnecessarily. He didn't want to put anything on his son's memory tapes which might upset him. "Nothing at all, my boy. Thought you had a scratch near your eye." He clapped him on the shoulder, the plastic as smooth and resilient as any living flesh. "You're as sound as a dollar. Now beat it and let me read a while."

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OF COURSE they taught the boy to do only good. Recorded on Robert's memory tapes were the careful teachings of a mother and father who believed faithfully in honesty, truth, love. Nor were they worried about outside influences corrupting their son. They knew that he would only record their own teachings until they had his mechanism adjusted to accept outside offerings. They would do that when he started school. And by that time, they felt the boy's personality would be thoroughly shaped. They were quite proud of themselves, Eddie and Mary. They had raised a fine boy thus far, and they looked back on their purchase as the real beginning of their lives.

They shared their love for the boy with the entire neighborhood, boasting about him, showing him off, wearing their pride in him like a warm cloak. Mr. Jeffries, Mr. Anderson, the young Clark couple, the D'Allessio's, McCarthy the cop, the tailor, the baker, everyone knew of Robert, and everyone smiled amiably whenever Robert and Eddie walked down the street.

Eddie forgot all about the twinkle behind Robert's right eye, because it was hardly noticeable anyway. He told it to Mary, but she accepted it and then forgot it, and they continued to educate the boy through his memory tapes, making him into the upright person they wanted their only son to be.

They were surprised to discover their boy had learned to do evil.

IT WAS Eddie who made the discovery. He was coming home from work, walking up the street to his small home. He nodded at Josie D'Allessio hanging out her wash, said hello to McCarthy as he swung by on his beat, waved to Mr. Jeffries next door. He came into his own front yard, closing the gate gently behind him.

"Mary?" he called. There was no answer. He shrugged and tucked his newspaper under his arm. "Robert?" This time, when he got no answer, he was slightly alarmed. Until he heard the noises coming from behind the garage. A smile expanded over his face as he recognized Robert's voice. Quietly, he put his paper down on the front stoop and tiptoed around the house.

He could hear Robert's voice more clearly now. He could hardly keep from laughing as he moved closer. And then he heard what Robert was saying.

"Kill it! Kill it! Kill the living thing!"

A shock ran up his spine, and he froze motionless, blinking his eyes. Robert was holding a frog on the ground, blood spilling from its punctured body. With a knife he'd taken from the kitchen drawer, he kept stabbing at the green and crimson mass beneath his spread fingers, intoning his hateful chant.

"Kill it! Kill the living thing!"

Eddie turned away, revulsion crawling through him like a horde of slimy insects.

He went to the bathroom and washed his hands, and then he sat down to wait for Mary. When she came home from the beauty parlor, he told her about it.

"I . . . I don't know what to do," he said. "He . . . where did he pick that up?"

"Did . . . did you scold him?"

"Scold him? No, no—of course not."

"Someone's been tampering with him," Mary said. "They've fixed his insides so that he can record outside impressions. Someone taught him that."

"Someone taught him to kill," Eddie said in a dead voice. "To kill . . . living things."

"Who?" Mary asked.

"Who?" Eddie echoed.

When Robert came in to supper that night, his hands were clean, and he bore an angelic smile on his face.

"Hello, son," Eddie said. "Where have you been hiding all day?"

Robert smiled and took his place at the table. "Down to the ball park," he said. "Few of the fellows got a game going."

Eddie's eyes opened in horror, and he looked at Mary. Mary's face almost

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crumpled. This was her twelve-year old son speaking. This was her son lying.

That night, they decided to do something about it.

But the questioning had to be very tactful.

They didn't want anyone to know that Robert was a robot, and yet they wanted to find out just who had fed his memory tapes such poison.

They took different sections of the neighborhood, dividing all the houses and shops between them.

Everyone was most co-operative. They answered all the questions that were put to them. No, they hadn't seen any of the neighbors behaving strangely with Robert. No, they hadn't even seen any of them alone with Robert. Why, what was it all about?

Eddie moved from house to house, from store to store. Something was troubling him. Something about the way they'd looked at him, with pity was it? Or what? Just what? He didn't pinpoint it until he spoke to Mr. Jeffries next door.

"So you're worried about the boy, eh?" Mr. Jeffries asked.

"Yes. Yes, I am. I feel . . . I think someone has been . . . been corrupting him."

Mr. Jeffries chuckled. "Now, now, Eddie, that's silly."

"No," Eddie insisted. "Someone has been twisting his mind. Someone is teaching him to . . . to kill."

Mr. Jeffries opened his eyes wide, and Eddie looked deep into their pupils.

"Y-yes," Eddie stammered.

"To kill, you say?"

Eddie kept looking into Mr. Jeffries' eyes. "To . . . to kill living things," he said.

Mr. Jeffries laughed loudly. "Well, now, we're all living things." He paused. "Aren't we?"

Eddie turned and ran. He had seen it there, deep in Mr. Jeffries' eyes; he had seen it and he knew what it was now. He threw open the front door.

"Mary," he shouted. "Mary! Oh my God, Mary!"

His wife was sitting on the couch, her head buried in her hands. She had just returned from covering her half of the neighborhood, and she was still wearing her coat. She looked up when Eddie came into the room.

"Mary," he said, "we've got to get out of here. Mr. Jeffries, the D'Allessio's, the Clarks—"

"And McCarthy the cop, and the Steins, and the grocer, and—" She buried her face in her hands. "It's no use, Eddie. It's no use. We can't run away."

"The flicker," he said. "Behind the right eye. The flicker."

"Yes . . . yes." Mary's voice was broken and toneless.

"Robots," Eddie said flatly. "All robots. Every last one of them. Robots."

He fell to his knees at Mary's feet, burying his head in her lap.

Neither of them heard Robert as he came into the room with the pair of shears clutched tightly in his fist, his eyes flickering.

Featured Next Issue

CAPTIVE AUDIENCE

A Novel of the Cold War With Mars

By WALLACE WEST

Read This Brilliant Sequel to THE BIRD OF TIME!

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MOTHER

A Novelet

By PHILIP JOSÉ FARMER

I

LOOK, mother. The clock is running backwards."

Eddie Fetts pointed to the hands on the pilot room dial, always set on Central Standard Time because the majority of the research expedition thought it would remind them of their home state, Illinois, whenever they looked at it. When staryachting, one time was as good as another.

Dr. Paula Fetts said, "The crash must have reversed it."

"How could it do that?"

"I can't tell you. I don't know everything, son."

"Oh!"

"Well, don't look at me so disappointedly. I'm a pathologist, not an elecronicist."

"Don't be so cross, mother. I can't stand it. Not now."

He walked out of the pilot room. Anxiously, she followed him. Burying the crew and her fellow scientists had been very trying for him. Spilled blood had always made him dizzy and sick; he could scarcely control his hands enough to help her sack the scattered bones and entrails.

He had wanted to put the corpses in the nuclear furnace, but she had forbidden that. The Geigers amidships were ticking loudly, warning that there was an invisible death in the stern.

The meteor that struck the moment the ship came out of Translation into normal space had probably wrecked the engine-room. So she had understod from the incoherent highpitched phrases of a colleague before he fled to the pilot room. She had hurried to find Eddie. She feared his cabin door would still be locked, as he had been making a tape of the *Heavy Hangs the Albatross* aria from Gianelli's *Ancient Mariner*.

Fortunately, the emergency system had automatically thrown out the locking circuits. Entering, she had called out his name in fear he'd been hurt. He was lying half-unconscious on the floor, but it was not the accident that had thrown him there. The reason lay in the corner, released from his lax hand: a quart free-fall thermos, rubber-nippled. From Eddie's open mouth charged a breath of rye that not even chlorophyll pills had been able to conceal.

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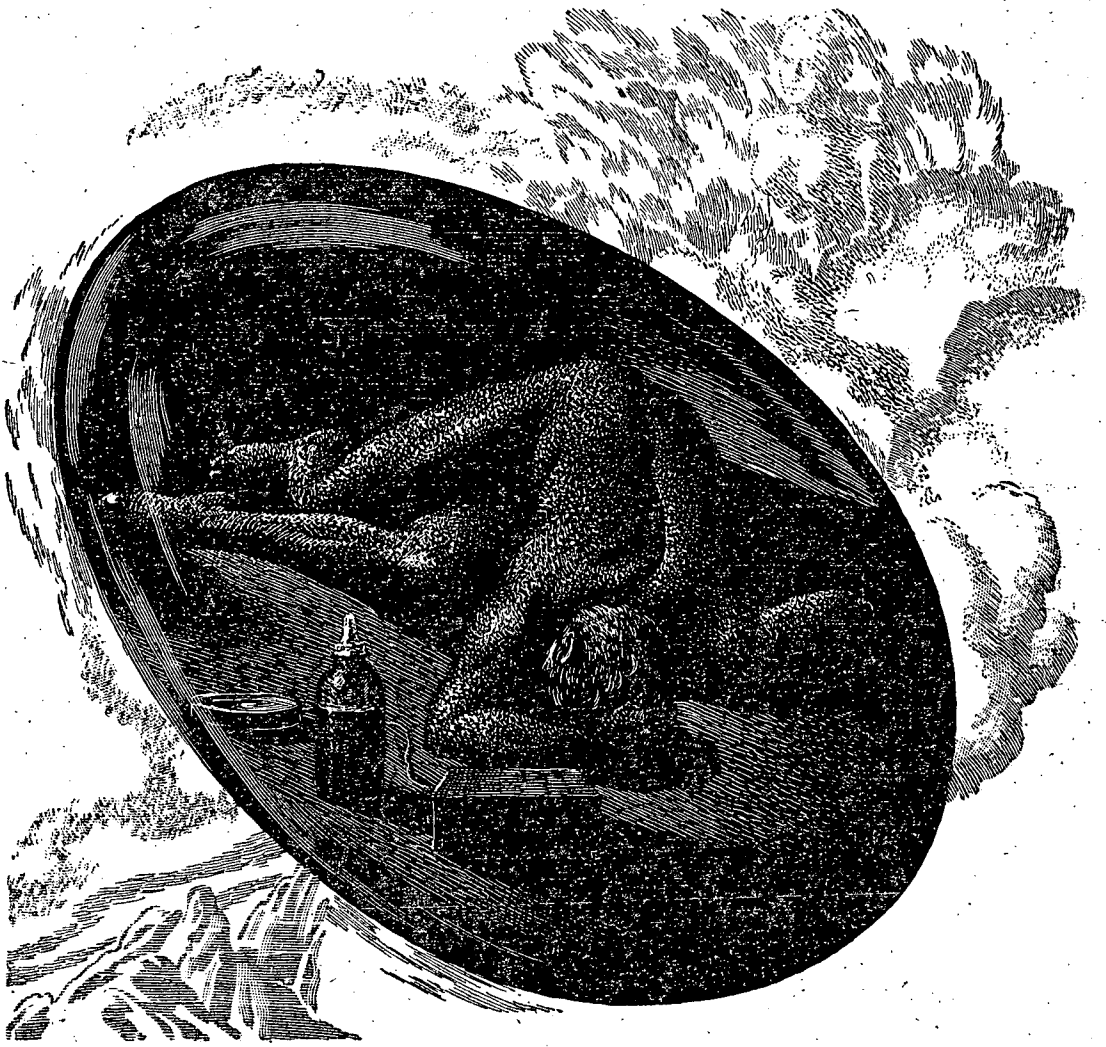
A man hopes,

a man searches—

and then a man finally

finds the answer which he has sought

from the day of his birth



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Sharply, she had commanded him to get up and onto the bed. Her voice, the first he had ever heard, pierced through the phalanx of Old Red Star. He struggled up, and she, though smaller, had thrown every ounce of her weight into getting him up and onto the bed.

There she had lain down with him and strapped them both in. She understood that the lifeboat had been wrecked also, and that it was up to the captain to bring the yacht down safely to the surface of this charted but unexplored planet, Baudelaire. Everybody else had gone to sit behind the captain, strapped in their crashchairs, unable to help except with their silent backing.

Moral support had not been enough. The ship had come in on a shallow slant. Too fast, though. The wounded motors had not been able to hold her up. The prow had taken the brunt of the punishment. So had those seated in the nose.

Dr. Fetts had held her son's head on her bosom and prayed out loud to her God. Eddie had snored and muttered. Then there was a sound like the clashing of the gates of doom—a tremendous bong as if the ship were a clapper in a gargantuan bell tolling the most frightening message human ears may hear—a blinding blast of light—and darkness and silence.

A few moments later Eddie began crying out in a childish voice, "Don't leave me to die, mother! Come back! Come back!"

Mother was unconscious by his side, but he did not know that. He wept for a while, then he lapsed back into his rye-fogged stupor—if he had ever been out of it—and slept. Again, darkness and silence.

IT WAS the second day since the crash, if "day" could describe that twilight state on Baudelaire. Dr. Fetts followed her son wherever he went. She knew he was very sensitive and easily upset. All his life she had known it and had tried to get between him and anything that would cause trouble. She had succeeded, she thought, fairly well until three months ago when Eddie had eloped.

The girl was Polina Fameux, the ash-blonde long-legged actress whose tridi image, taped, had been shipped to all stars where a small acting talent and a large and shapely bosom were admired. Since Eddie was a wellknown Metro baritone, the marriage made a big splash whose ripples ran around the civilized Galaxy.

Dr. Fetts had felt very bad about the elopement, but she had she knew, hidden her grief very well beneath a smiling mask. She didn't regret having to give him up; after all, he was a full-grown man, no longer her little boy; but, really, aside from the seasons at the Met and his tours, he had not been parted from her since he was eight.

That was when she went on a honeymoon with her second husband. And then they'd not been separated long, for Eddie had gotten very sick, and she'd had to hurry back and take care of him, as he had insisted she was the only one who could make him well.

Moreover, you couldn't count his days at the opera as being a total loss, for he vised her every noon and they had a long talk—no matter how high the vise bills rans.

The ripples caused by her son's marriage were scarcely a week old before they were followed by even bigger ones. They bore the news of the separation of the two. A fortnight later, Polina applied for divorce on grounds of incompatibility. Eddie was handed the papers in his mother's apartment. He had come back to her the day he and Polina had agreed they "couldn't make a go of it," or, as he phrased it to his mother, "couldn't get together."

Dr. Fetts was, of course, very curious about the reason for their parting; but, as she explained to her friends, she "respected" his silence. What she didn't say was that she had told herself the time would come when he would tell her all.

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Eddie's "nervous breakdown" started shortly afterwards. He had been very irritable, moody, and depressed, but he got worse the day a so-called friend told Eddie that whenever Polina heard his name mentioned, she laughed loud and long. The friend added that Polina had promised to tell someday the true story of their brief merger.

That night his mother had to call in a doctor.

In the days that followed, she thought of giving up her position as research pathologist at De Kruif and taking up all her time to help him "get back on his feet.". It was a sign of the struggle going on in her mind that she had not been able to decide within a week's time. Ordinarily given to swift consideration and resolution of a problem, she could not agree to surrender her beloved quest into tissue regeneration.

Just as she was on the verge of doing what was for her the incredible and the shameful: tossing a coin, she had been vised by her superior. He told her she had been chosen to go with a group of biologists on a research cruise to ten preselected planetary systems.

Overjoyed, she had thrown away the papers that would turn Eddie over to a sanatorium. And, since he was quite famous, she had used her influence and his good name to get the government to allow him to go along. Ostensibly, he was to make a survey of the development of opera on planets colonized by Terrans. That the yacht was not visiting any colonized globes seemed to have been missed by the bureaus concerned. But it was not the first time in the history of a government that its left hand knew not what its right was doing.

Actually,, he was to be "rebuilt" by his mother, who thought of herself as being much more capable of setting him up again than any of the prevalent A, F, J, R, S, K, or H therapies. True, some of her friends reported amazing results with some of the symbol-chasing techniques. On the other hand, she knew two close companions who had tried them all and had gotten no benefits from any of them.

After all, she decided, she was his mother; she could do more for him than any of those "alphabatties;" he was flesh of her flesh, blood of her blood. Besides, he wasn't so sick. He just got awfully blue sometimes and made theatrical but insincere threats of suicide or else just sat and stared into space. But she could handle him.

About the Author

PHILIP FARMER'S first published story, THE LOVERS, which ran as the lead novel in STARTLING STORIES for August, 1952, created an unparalleled furore in science-fiction circles. Before the magazine was a day old, a book firm had signed Farmer to a contract for THE LOVERS and a sequel still to be written, plus a third novel only in the planning stage.

The sequel will appear, naturally, in STARTLING STORIES; meanwhile Farmer is hard at work on shorts and novelets of assorted lengths. We are happy to have given the initial boost to a fine and growing talent. Here is his second story—a difficult theme handled with rare and outstanding honesty.

—The Editor

II

SO NOW it was that she followed him from the backward-running clock to his room. And saw him step inside, look

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for a second, and then turn to her with a twisted face.

"Neddie is ruined, mother. Absolutely ruined."

She glanced at the piano. It had torn loose from the wallracks at the moment of impact and smashed itself against the opposite wall. To Eddie, it wasn't just a piano; it was Neddie. He had a pet name for everything he contacted for more than a brief time. It was as if he hopped from one appellation to the next, like an ancient sea sailor who felt lost unless he were close to the familiar and designated points of the shoreline. Otherwise, Eddie seemed to be drifting helplessly in a chaotic ocean, one that was anonymous and amorphous.

Or, analogy more typical of him, he was like the nightclubber who feels submerged, drowning, unless he hops from table to table, going from one well-known group of faces to the next, and avoiding the featureless and unnamed dummies at the strangers' tables.

He did not cry over Neddie. She wished he would. He had been so apathetic during the voyage. Nothing, not even the unparalleled splendor of the naked stars nor the inexpressible alienness of strange planets had seemed to lift him very long. If he would only weep or laugh loudly or display some sign that he was reacting violently to what was happening. She would even have welcomed his striking her in anger or calling her bad names.

But no, not even during the gathering of the mangled corpses, when he looked for a while as if he were going to vomit, would he give way to his body's demand for expression. She understood that if he were to throw up, he would be much better for it, would, as it were, have gotten rid of much of the psychic disturbance along with the physical.

He would not. He had kept on raking flesh and bones into the large plastic bags and kept a fixed look of resentment and sullenness.

She hoped now that the loss of his piano would bring the big tears and the racked shoulders. Then she could take him in her arms and give him sympathy. He would be her little boy again, afraid of the dark, afraid of the dog killed by a car, seeking her arms for the sure safety, the sure love.

"Never mind, baby," she said. "When we're rescued, we'll get you a new one."

"When—!"

He lifted his eyebrows and sat down on the bed's edge.

"What do we do now?"

She became very brisk and efficient.

"The ultrad was set working the moment the meteor struck. If it's survived the crash, it's still sending SOS's. If not, then there's nothing we can do about it. Neither of us knows how to repair it.

"However, it's possible that in the last five years since this planet was charted, other expeditions may have landed here. Not from Earth, but from some of the colonies. Or from nonhuman globes. Who knows? It's worth taking a chance. Let's see."

A SINGLE glance was enough to wreck their hopes about the ultrad. It had been twisted and broken until it was no longer even recognizable as the machine that sent swifter-than-light waves through the no-ether.

Dr. Fetts said with false cheeriness, "Well, that's that! So what? It makes things too easy. Let's go into the storeroom and see what we can see."

Eddie shrugged and followed her. There she insisted that both take a panrad. If they had to separate for any reason, they could always communicate and also, using the DF's—the direction finders built within it—locate each other. Having used them before, they knew the instrument's capabilities and how essential they were on scouting or camping trips.

The panrads were lightweight cylinders about two and a half feet high and eight inches in diameter. Crampacked, they held the mechanisms of two dozen different utilities. They never ran out of power, because their batteries could

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be recharged from the body electricity of their owners, and they were practically indestructible and worked under almost any conditions, even under water or in extreme cold or heat.

Dr. Fetts insisted they handcuff their left wrists to the cylinders as long as they were outside the yacht. That way, they couldn't drop them and thus have no chance of keeping in touch. Eddie thought such precaution was ridiculous, but he said nothing.

Keeping away from the side of the ship that had the huge hole in it, they took the panrads outside. The long wave bands were searched by Eddie while his mother moved the dial that ranged up and down the shortwaves. Neither really expected to hear anythng, but their quest was better than doing nothing.

Finding the modulated wave-frequencies empty of any significant noises, he switched to the continuous waves. He was startled by a dot-dashing.

"Hey, mom! Something in the 1000 kilocycles! Unmodulated!"

"Naturally, son," she said with some exasperation in the midst of her elation. "What would you expect from a radio-telegraphic signal?"

She found the band on her own cylinder. He looked blankly at her. "I know nothing about radio, but that's not Morse."

"What? You must be mistaken!"

"I—I don't think so."

"Is it or isn't it? Good God, son, make up your mind fast about something you should be sure of."

She turned the amplifier up. Though it wasn't necessary, she cocked her head to listen. As both of them had learned Galacto-Morse through sleeplearn techniques, she checked him at once.

"You're right. What do you make of it?"

His quick ear pounced on the pulses.

"No simple dot and dash. Four different time-lengths."

He listened some more.

"They've got a certain rhythm, all right. I can make out definite groupings. Ah! That's the sixth time I've caught that particular one. And there's another. And another."

DR. FETTS shook her ash-blonde head. She could make out nothing but a series of zzt-zzt-zzt's. There was a rhythm to it, she admitted, but even after trying hard to identify certain units, she didn't recognize them when they repeated. Well, she shrugged, she was as tone-deaf and non-musical as they came. Eddie took after his father in that trait.

He glanced at the DF needle.

"Coming from NE by E. Should we try to locate?"

"Naturally," she replied. "But we'd better eat first. We don't know how far away it is, or what we'll find there. While I'm getting a hot meal ready, you get our field trip stuff ready."

"O.K.," he said with more enthusiasm than he had shown for a long time.

When he came back he ate all of the large dish his mother had prepared on the unwrecked galley stove.

"You always did make the best stew," he said.

"Thank you. I'm glad you're eating again, son. I am surprised. I thought you'd be sick about all this."

He waved vaguely, but energetically.

"The challenge of the unknown, you know. I have a sort of feeling this is going to turn out much better than we thought. Much better."

She came close and sniffed his breath. It was clean, innocent even of stew. That meant he'd taken chlorophyll, which probably meant he'd been sampling some hidden rye. Otherwise, how explain his reckless disregard of the possible dangers? It wasn't like his normal attitude.

She said nothing, for she knew that if he tried to hide a bottle in his clothes or field sack while they were tracking down the radio signals, she would soon find it. And take it away. He wouldn't even protest, merely let her lift it from

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his limp hand while his lips swelled with resentment.

III

THEY set out. Both wore knapsacks and carried cuffed panrads. He had slung a gun over his shoulder, and she had snapped onto her sack her small black bag of medical and lab supplies.

High noon of late autumn was topped by a weak red sun that barely managed to make itself seen through the eternal double layer of clouds. Its twin, an even smaller blob of lilac, was setting on the northwestern horizon. They walked in a sort of bright twilight, the best that Baudelaire ever achieved. Yet, despite the lack of light, the air was too warm. That was a phenomenon common to certain planets behind the Horsehead Nebula, one being investigated but as yet unexplained.

The country was hilly and had many deep ravines. Here and there were prominences high enough and steep-sided enough to be called embryo mountains. Considering the roughness of the land, however, there was a surprising amount of vegetation. Pale green, red, and yellow bushes, vines, and little trees clung to every bit of ground, horizontal or vertical. All had comparatively broad leaves that turned with the sun in hopes to catch the most of the light.

From time to time, as the two Terrans strode noisily through the forest, small multi-colored insect-like and mammal-like creatures scuttled from hiding place to hiding place. Eddie decided to unsling his gun and carry it in the crook of his arm. Then, after they were forced to scramble up and down ravines and hills and fight their way through thickets that became unexpectedly tangled, he put it back over his shoulder, where it hung from a strap.

Despite their exertions, they did not tire fast. They weighed about twenty pounds less than they would have on Earth, and, though the air was thinner, it was, for some unknown reason, richer in oxygen.

Dr. Fetts kept up with Eddie. Thirty years the senior of the twenty-three year old, she passed even at close inspection for his older sister. Longevity pills took care of that. However, he treated her with all the courtesy and chivalry that one gave one's mother and helped her up the steep inclines, even though the climbs did not appreciably cause her deep chest to demand more air.

They paused once by a creek bank to get their bearings.

"The signals have stopped," he said.

"Obviously," she replied.

At that moment the radar-detector built into the panrad began a high ping-ping-ping. Both of them automatically looked upwards.

"There's no ship in the air."

"It can't be coming from either of those hills," she pointed out. "There's nothing but a boulder on top of each. Tremendous rocks."

"Nevertheless, it's coming from there, I think. Oh! Oh! Did you see what I saw? Looked like a tall stalk of some kind being pulled down behind that big rock."

She peered through the dim light. "I think you were imagining things, son. I saw nothing."

Then, even as the pinging kept up, the zzting started again. But after a burst of noise, both stopped.

"Let's go up and see what we shall see," she said.

"Something screwy," he commented. She did not answer.

They forded the creek and began the ascent. Halfway up, they stopped to sniff puzzledly at a gust of some heavy odor coming downwind.

"Smells like a cageful of monkeys," he said.

"In heat," she added. If he had the keener ear, hers was the sharper nose.

THEY went on up. The RD began sounding its tiny hysterical gonging. Nonplused, Eddie stopped. The DF indicated the radar pulses were not com-

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ing from the top of the hill up which they were going, as formerly, but from the other hill across the valley. Abruptly, the panrad fell silent.

"What do we do now?"

"Finish what we started. This hill. Then we go to the other."

He shrugged and then hastened after her tall slim body in its long-legged coveralls. She was hot on the scent, literally, and nothing could stop her. Just before she reached the bungalowsized boulder topping the hill, he caught up with her. She had stopped to gaze intently at the DF needle, which swung wildly before it stopped at neutral. The monkey-cage odor was very strong.

"Do you suppose it could be some sort of radio-creating mineral?" she asked, disappointedly.

"No. Those groupings were semantic. And that smell . . . ."

"Then what—?"

He didn't know whether to feel pleased or not because she had so obviously and suddenly thrust the burden of responsibility and action on him. Both pride and a curious shrinking affected him. But he did feel exhilarated. Almost, he thought, he felt as if he were on the verge of discovering what he had been looking for for a long time. What the object of his search had been, he could not say. But he was excited and not very much afraid.

He unslung his weapon, a two-barreled combination shotgun and rifle. The panrad was still quiet.

"Maybe the boulder is camouflage for a spy outfit," he said. He sounded silly, even to himself.

Behind him, his mother gasped and screamed. He whirled and raised his gun, but there was nothing to shoot. She was pointing at the hilltop across the valley, shaking, and saying something incoherent.

He could make out a long slim antenna seemingly projecting from the monstrous boulder crouched there. At the same time, two thoughts struggled for first place in his mind: one, that it was more than a coincidence that both hills had almost identical stone structures on their brows, and, two, that the antenna must have been recently stuck out, for he was sure that he had not seen it the last time he looked.

He never got to tell her his conclusions, for something thin and flexible and manifold and irresistible seized him from behind. Lifted into the air, he was borne backwards. He dropped the gun and tried to grab the bands or tentacles around him and tear them off with his bare hands. No use.

He caught one last glimpse of his mother running off down the hillside. Then a curtain snapped down, and he was in total darkness.

IV

BEFORE he could gather what had happened, Eddie sensed himself, still suspended, twirled around. He could not know for sure, of course, but he thought he was facing exactly the opposite direction. Simultaneously, the tentacles binding his legs and arms were released. Only his waist was still gripped. It was pressed so tightly that he cried out with pain.

Then, boot-toes bumping on some resilient substance, he was carried forward. Halted, facing he knew not what horrible monster, he was suddenly assailed—not by a sharp beak or tooth or knife or some other cutting or mangling instrument—but by a dense cloud of that same monkey perfume.

In other circumstances, he might have vomited. Now his stomach was not given the time to consider whether it should clean house or not. The tentacle lifted him higher and thrust him against something soft and yielding—something fleshlike and womanly—almost breastlike in texture and smoothness and warmth, and its hint of gentle curving.

He put his hands and feet out to brace himself, for he thought for a moment he was going to sink in and be covered

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up—enfolded—ingested. The idea of a gargantuan amoeba-thing hiding within a hollow rock—or a rocklike shell—made him writhe and yell, and shove at the protoplasmic substance.

But nothing of the kind happened. He was not plunged into a smothering and slimy featherbed that would strip him of his skin and then his flesh and then either dissolve his bones or reject them. He was merely shoved repeatedly against the soft swelling. Each time he pushed or kicked or struck at it. After a dozen of these seemingly purposeless acts, he was held away, as if whatever was doing it was puzzled by his behavior.

He had quit screaming. The only sounds were his harsh breathings and the zzzts and pings from the panrad. Even as he became aware of them, the zzzts changed tempo and settled into a recognizable pattern of bursts—three units that crackled out again and again.

"Who are you? Who are you?"

Of course, it could just as easily have been, "What are you?" or "What the hell!" or "Nov smoz ka pop?"

Or nothing—semantically speaking.

But he didn't think the latter. And when he was gently lowered to the floor, and the tentacle went off to only-God-knew-where in the dark, he was sure that the creature was communicating—or trying to—with him.

It was this thought that kept him from screaming and running around in the lightless and fetid chamber, brainlessly, instinctively seeking an outlet. He mastered his panic and snapped open a little shutter in the panrad's side and thrust in his righthand index finger. There he poised it above the key and in a moment, when the thing paused in transmitting, he sent back, as best he could, the pulses he had received. It was not necessary for him to turn on the light and spin the dial that would put him on the 1000 kc. band. The instrument would automatically key that frequency in with the one he had just received.

The oddest part about the whole procedure was that his whole body was trembling almost uncontrollably—one part excepted. That was his index finger, his one unit that seemed to him to have a definite function in this otherwise meaningless situation. It was the section of him that was helping him to survive—the only part that knew how—at that moment. Even his brain seemed to have no connection with his finger. That digit was himself, and the rest just happened to be linked to it.

When he paused, the transmitter began again. This time the units were unrecognizable. There was a certain rhythm to them, but he could not know what they meant. Meanwhile, the RD was pinging. Something somewhere in the dark hole had a beam held tightly on him.

He pressed a button on the panrad's top, and the built-in flashlight illuminated the area just in front of him. He saw a wall of reddish-gray rubbery substance and on the wall a roughly circular and light grey swelling about four feet in diameter. Around it, giving it a Medusa appearance, were coiled twelve very long and very thin tentacles.

Though he was afraid that if he turned his back to them, the tentacles would seize him once more, his curiosity forced him to wheel about and examine with the bright beam his surroundings. He was in an egg-shaped chamber about thirty feet long, twelve wide, and eight to ten high in the middle. It was formed of a reddish-grey material, smooth except for irregular intervals of blue or red pipes. Veins and arteries, obviously.

A door-sized portion of the wall had a vertical slit running down it. Tentacles fringed it. He guessed it was sort of iris and that it had opened to drag him inside. Starfish-shaped groupings of tentacles were scattered on the walls or hung from the ceiling. On the wall opposite the iris was a long and flexible stalk with a cartilaginous ruff around its free end. When Eddie moved, it moved, its blind point following him as

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a radar antenna pursues the thing it is locating. That was what it was. And unless he was wrong, the stalk was also a C.W. transmitter-receiver.

He shot the light on around. When it reached the end farthest from him, he gasped. Ten creatures were huddled together facing him! About the size of half-grown pigs, they looked like nothing so much as unshelled snails; they were eyeless, and the stalk growing from the forehead of each was a tiny duplicate of that on the wall. They didn't look dangerous. Their open mouths were little and toothless, and their rate of locomotion must be slow, for they moved, like a snail, on a large pedestal of flesh—a foot-muscle.

Nevertheless, if he were to fall asleep, they could overcome him by force of numbers, and those mouths might drip an acid to digest him, or they might carry a concealed poisonous sting.

HIS speculations were interrupted violently. He was seized, lifted, and passed on to another group of tentacles. He was carried beyond the antenna-stalk and toward the snail-beings. Just before he reached them, he was halted, facing the wall. An iris, hitherto invisible, opened. His light shone into it, but he could see nothing but convolutions of flesh.

His panrad gave off a new pattern of dit-dot-deet-dats. The iris widened until it was large enough to admit his body, if he were shoved in headfirst. Or feetfirst. It didn't matter. The convolutions straightened out and became a tunnel. Or a throat. From thousands of little pits emerged thousands of tiny and razor sharp teeth. They flashed out and sank back in, and before they had disappeared thousands of other wicked little spears darted out and past the receding fangs.

Meat-grinder effect.

Beyond the murderous array, at the end of the throat, was a huge pouch of water, a veritable tank. Steam came from it, and with it an odor like that of his mother's stew. Dark bits, presumably meat, and pieces of vegetables floated on the seething surface.

Then the iris closed, and he was turned around to face the slugs. Gently, but unmistakably, a tentacle spanked his buttocks. And the panrad zzzted a warning.

Eddie was not stupid. He knew now that the ten creatures were not dangerous unless he molested them. In which case he had just seen where he would go if he did not behave.

Again he was lifted and carried along the wall until he was shoved against the light grey spot. The monkey-cage odor, which had died out, became strong again. Eddie identified its source with a very small hole which appeared in the wall.

When he did not respond—he had no idea yet how he was supposed to act—the tentacles dropped him so unexpectedly that he fell on his back. Unhurt by the yielding flesh, he rose.

What was the next step? Exploration of his resources. Itemization: The panrad. A sleeping-bag, which he wouldn't need as long as the present too-warm temperature kept up. A bottle of Old Red Star capsules. A free-fall thermos with attached nipple. A box of A-2-Z rations. A Foldstove. Cartridges for his double-barrel, now lying outside the creature's boulderish shell. A roll of toilet paper. Toothbrush. Paste. Soap. Towel. Pills: chlorophyll, Hormone, vitamin, longevity, reflex, and sleeping. And a thread-thin wire, a hundred feet long when uncoiled, that held prisoner in its molecular structure a hundred symphonies, eighty operas, a thousand different types of musical pieces, and two thousand great books ranging from Sophocles and Dostoyevsky and Hammett and Henry Miller to the latest best-seller. It could be run off inside the panrad.

He inserted it, thumbed a designated spot, and spoke, "Eddie Fetts's recording of Puccini's *Che gelida manina*, please."

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And while he listened approvingly to his own magnificent voice, he zipped open a can he had found in the bottom of the sack. His mother had put into it the stew left over from their last meal in the ship.

Not knowing what was happening, yet, for some reason, sure he was, for the present, safe, he munched meat and vegetables with a contented jaw. Transition from abhorrence to appetite sometimes came easily for Eddie.

He cleaned out the can and finished up with some crackers and a chocolate bar. Rationing was out. As long as the food lasted, he would eat well. Then, if nothing turned up, he would. . . But then, somehow, he reassured himself as he licked his fingers, his mother, who was free, would find some way to get him out of his trouble.

She always had.

V

THE panrad, silent for a while, began signaling. Eddie spotlighted the antenna and saw it was pointing at the snail-beings, which he had, in accordance with his custom, dubbed familiarly. Sluggos he called them.

The Sluggos crept towards the wall and stopped close to it. Their mouths, built on the tops of their heads, gaped like so many hungry young birds. The iris opened, and two lips formed into a spout. Out of it streamed steaming-hot water and chunks of meat and vegetables. Stew! Stew that fell exactly into each waiting mouth.

That was how Eddie learned the second phrase of Mother Polyphema's language. The first mesage had been, "What are you?" This was, "Come and get it!"

He experimented. He tapped out a repetition of what he'd last heard. As one, the Sluggos—except the one then being fed—turned to him and crept a few feet before halting, puzzled.

Inasmuch as Eddie was broadcasting, the Sluggos must have had some sort of built-in DF. Otherwise they wouldn't have been able to distinguish between his pulses and their Mother's.

Immediately after, a tentacle smote Eddie across the shoulders and knocked him down. The panrad zzzted its third intelligible message: "Don't ever do that!"

And then a fourth, to which the ten young obeyed by wheeling and resuming their former positions.

"This way, children."

Yes, they were the offspring, living, eating, sleeping, playing, and learning to communicate in the womb of their mother—the Mother. They were the mobile brood of this vast immobile entity that had scooped up Eddie as a frog scoops up a fly. This Mother. She who had once been just such a Sluggo until she had grown hog-size and had been pushed out of her Mother's womb. And who, rolled into a tight ball, had free-wheeled down her natal hill, straightened out at the bottom, inched her way up the next hill, rolled down, and so on. Until she found the empty shell of an adult who had died. Or, if she wanted to be a first class citizen in her society and not a prestigeless *occupée*, she found the bare top of a tall hill—or any eminence that commanded a big sweep of territory—and there squatted.

And there she put out many thread-thin tendrils into the soil and into the cracks in the rocks, tendrils that drew sustenance from the fat of her body and grew and extended downwards and ramified into other tendrils. Deep underground the rootlets worked their instinctive chemistry; searched for and found the water, the calcium, the iron, the copper, the nitrogen, the carbons, fondled earthworms and grubs and larvae, teasing them for the secrets of their fats and proteins; broke down the wanted substance into shadowy colloidal particles; sucked them up the thready pipes of the tendrils and back to the pale and slimming body crouching on a flat space atop a ridge, a hill, a peak.

There, using the blueprints stored in

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the molecules of the cerebellum, her body took the building blocks of elements and fashioned them into a very thin shell of the most available material, a shield large enough so she could expand to fit it while her natural enemies —the keen and hungry predators that prowled twilighted Baudelaire—nosed and clawed it in vain.

Then, her evergrowing bulk cramped, she would resorb the hard covering. And if no sharp tooth found her during that process of a few days, she would cast another and a larger. And so on through a dozen or more.

Until she had become the monstrous and much reformed body of an adult and virgin female. Outside would be the stuff that so much resembled a boulder, that was, actually, rock: either granite, diorite, marble, basalt, or maybe just plain limestone. Or sometimes iron, glass, or cellulose.

Within was the centrally located brain, probably as large as a man's. Surrounding it, the tons of the various organs: the nervous system, the mighty heart, or hearts, the four stomachs, the microwave and longwave generators, the kidneys, bowels, tracheae, scent and taste organs, the perfume factory which made odors to attract animals and birds close enough to be seized, and the huge womb. And the antennae—the small one inside for teaching and scanning the young, and a long and powerful stalk on the outside, projecting from the shelltop, retractable if danger came.

The next step was from virgin to Mother, lower case to uppercase as designated in her pulse-language by a longer pause before a word. Not until she was deflowered could she take a high place in her society. Immodest, unblushing, she herself made the advances, the proposals, and the surrender.

After which, she ate her mate.

THE all-around clock in the panrad told Eddie he was in his thirtieth day of imprisonment when he found out that little bit of information. He was shocked, not because it offened his ethics, but because he himself had been intended to be the mate. And the dinner.

His finger tapped, "Tell me, O Mother, what you mean."

He had not wondered before how a species that lacked males could reproduce. Now he found that, to the Mothers, all creatures except themselves were male. Mothers were immobile and female. Mobiles were male. Eddie had been mobile. He was, therefore, a male.

He had approached this particular Mother during the mating season, that is, midway through raising a litter of young. She had scanned him as he came along the creekbanks at the valley bottom. When he was at the foot of the hill, she had detected his odor. It was new to her. The closest she could come to it in her memorybanks was that of a beast similar to him. From her description, he guesed it to be an ape. So she had released from her repertoire its rut stench. When he seemingly fell into the trap, she had caught him.

He was supposed to attack the conception-spot, that light gray swelling on the wall. After he had ripped and torn it enough to begin the mysterious workings of pregnancy, he would have been popped into her stomach-iris.

Fortunately, he had lacked the sharp beak, the fang, the claw. And she had received her own signals back from the panrad.

Eddie did not understand why it was necessary to use a mobile for mating. A Mother was intelligent enough to pick up a sharp stone and mangle the spot herself.

He was given to understand that conception would not start unless it was accompanied by a certain titillation of the nerves—a frenzy and its satisfaction. Why this emotional state was needed, Mother did not know.

Eddie tried to explain about such things as genes and chromosomes and why they had to be present in highly-developed species in order to have differences and selections of favorable char-

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acteristics and open the gates to evolutionary changes.

Mother did not get it.

Eddie wondered if the number of slashes and rips in the spot corresponded to the number of young. Or, if in any way, say, there were a large number of potentialities in the heredity-ribbons spread out under the conception-skin. And if the haphazard irritation and consequent stimulation of the genes paralleled the chance combining of genes in human male-female mating. Thus resulting in offspring with traits that were both joinings and dissimilarities of their parents'.

Or did the inevitable devouring of the mobile after the act indicate more than an emotional and nutritional reflex? Did it hint that the mobile caught up scattered gene-nodes, like hard seeds, along with the torn skin, in its claws and tusks, that these genes survived the boiling in the stew-stomach, and were later passed out in the feces? Where animals and birds picked them up in beak, tooth, or foot, and then, seized by other Mothers in this oblique rape, transmitted the heredity-carrying agents to the conception-spots while attacking them, the nodules being scraped off and implanted in the skin and blood of the swelling even as others were harvested? Later, the mobiles were eaten, digested, and ejected in the obscure but ingenious and never-ending cycle? Thus ensuring the continual, if haphazard, recombining of genes, chances for variations in offspring, opportunities for mutations, and so on?

Mother pulsed that she was nonplused.

Eddie gave up. He'd never know. After all, did it matter?

He decided not and rose from his prone position to request water. She pursed up her iris and spouted a tepid quartful into his thermos. He dropped in a pill, swished it around till it dissolved, and drank a reasonable facsimile of Old Red Star. He preferred the harsh and powerful rye, though he could have afforded the smoothest. Quick results were what he wanted. Taste didn't matter, as he disliked all liquor tastes. Thus he drank what the Skid Row bums drank and shuddered even as they did so, renaming it Old Rotten Tar and cursing the fate that had brought them so low they had to gag such stuff down.

The rye glowed in his belly and spread quickly through his limbs and up to his head, chilled only by the increasing scarcity of the capsules. When he ran out—then what? It was at times like this that he most missed his mother.

Thinking about her brought a few large tears. He snuffled and drank some more and when the biggest of the Sluggos nudged him for a back-scratching, he gave it instead a shot of Old Red Star. A slug for Sluggo. Idly, he wondered what effect a taste for rye would have on the future of the race when these virgins became Mothers.

At that moment he was rocked by what seemed a wonderful lifesaving idea. These creatures could suck up the required elements from the earth and with them duplicate quite complex molecular structures. Provided, of course, they had a sample of the desired substance to brood over in some cryptic organ.

Well, what easier to do than give her one of the cherished capsules? One could become any number. Those, plus the abundance of water pumped up through hollow underground tendrils from the nearby creek, would give enough to make a master-distiller green!

He smacked his lips and was about to key her his request when what she was transmitting penetrated his mind.

Rather cattily, she remarked that her neighbor across the valley was putting on airs because she, too, held prisoner a communicating mobile.

VI

THE Mothers had a society as hierarchical as table-protocol in Washing-

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ton or the peck-order in a barnyard. Prestige was what counted, and prestige was determined by the broadcasting power, the height of the eminence on which the Mother sat, which governed the extent of her radar-territory, and the abundance and novelty and wittiness of her gossip. The creature that had snapped Eddie up was a Queen. She had precedence over thirty-odd of her kind; they all had to let her broadcast first, and none dared start pulsing until she quit. Then, the next in order began, and so on down the line. Any of them could be interrupted at any time by Number One, and if any of the lower echelon had something interesting to transmit, she could break in on the one then speaking and get permission from the Queen to tell her tale.

Eddie knew this, but he could not listen in directly to the hilltop-gabble. The thick pseudo-granite shell barred him from that and made him dependent upon her womb-stalk for relayed information.

Now and then Mother opened the door and allowed her young to crawl out. There they practiced beaming and broadcasting at the Sluggos of the Mother across the valley. Occasionally that Mother deigned herself to pulse the young, and Eddie's keeper reciprocated to her offspring.

Turnabout.

The first time the children had inched through the exit-iris, Eddie had tried, Ulysses-like, to pass himself off as one of them and crawl out in the midst of the flock. Eyeless, but no Polyphemus, Mother had picked him out with her tentacles and hauled him back in.

It was following that incident that he had named her Polyphema.

Thus, he knew she had increased her own already powerful prestige tremendously by possession of that unique thing—a transmitting mobile. So much had her importance grown that the Mothers on the fringes of her area passed on the news to others. Before he had learned her language, the entire continent was hooked-up. Polyphema had become a veritable gossip columnist; tens of thousands of hillcrouchers listened in eagerly to her accounts of her dealings with the walking paradox: a semantic male.

That had been fine. Then, very recently, the Mother across the valley had captured a similar creature. And in one bound she had become Number Two in the area and would, at the slightest weakness on Polyphema's part, wrest the top position away.

Eddie became wildly excited at the news. He had often daydreamed about his mother and wondered what she was doing. Curiously enough, he ended many of his fantasies with lip-mutterings, reproaching her almost audibly for having left him and for making no try to rescue him. When he became aware of his attitude, he was ashamed. Nevertheless, the sense of desertion colored his thoughts.

Now that he knew she was alive and had been caught, probably while trying to get him out, he rose from the lethargy that had lately been making him doze the clock around. He asked Polyphema if she would open the entrance so he could talk directly with the other captive. She said yes. Eager to listen in on a conversation between two mobiles, she was very co-operative. There would be a mountain of gossip in what they would have to say. The only thing that dented her joy was that the other Mother would also have access.

Then, remembering she was still Number One and would broadcast the details first, she trembled so with pride and ecstasy that Eddie felt the floor shaking.

Iris open, he walked through it and looked across the valley. The hillsides were still green, red, and yellow, as the plants on Baudelaire did not lose their leaves during winter. But a few white patches showed that winter had begun. Eddie shivered from the bite of cold air on his naked skin. Long ago he had taken off his clothes. The wombwarmth

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had made garments too uncomfortable; moreover, Eddie, being human, had had to get rid of waste products. And Polyphema, being a Mother, had had periodically to flush out the dirt with warm water from one of her stomachs. Every time the tracheae-vents exploded streams that swept the undesirable elements out through her door-iris, Eddie had become soaked. When he abandoned dress, his clothes had gone floating out. Only by sitting on his pack did he keep it from a like fate.

Afterwards, he and the Sluggos had been dried off by warm air pumped through the same vents and originating from the mighty battery of lungs. Eddie was comfortable enough—he'd always liked showers, anyway—but the loss of his garments had been one more thing that kept him from escaping. If he were to, he would soon freeze to death outside unless he found the yacht quickly. And he wasn't sure he remembered the path back.

SO NOW, when he stepped outside, he retreated a pace or two and let the warm air from Polyphema flow like a cloak from his shoulders.

Then he peered across the half-mile that separated him from his mother, but he could not see her. The twilight state and the dark of the unlit interior of her captor quite hid her.

He tapped, in Morse, "Switch to the talkie, same frequency." Paula Fetts did so. She began asking him, frantically, if he were all right.

He replied he was fine.

"Have you missed me terribly, son?"

"Oh, very much."

Even as he said this, he wondered, vaguely, why his voice sounded so hollow. Despair at never again being able to see her, probably.

"I've almost gone crazy, Eddie. When you were caught I ran away as fast as I could. I had no idea what horrible monster it was that was attacking us. And then, halfway down the hill, I fell and broke my leg. . . ."

"Oh, no, mother!"

"Yes. But I managed to crawl back to the ship. And there, after I'd set it myself, I gave myself B.K shots. Only, my system didn't react like it's supposed to. There are people that way, you know, and the healing took twice as long.

"But when I was able to walk, I got a gun and a box of Blasto. I was going to blow up what I thought was a kind of rock-fortress, an outpost for some kind of extee. I'd no idea of the true nature of these beasts. First, though, I decided to reconnoiter. I was going to spy on the boulder from across the valley. And I was trapped by this thing.

"Listen, son. Before I'm cut off for any reason, let me tell you not to give up hope. I'll be out of here before long and over to rescue you."

"How?"

"If you remember, my lab kit holds a number of carcinogens for field work. Well, you know that sometimes a Mother's conception-spot, torn up during mating, instead of begetting young, goes into cancer—the opposite of pregnancy. I've injected a carcinogen into the spot and a beautiful carcinoma has developed. She'll be dead in a few days."

"Mom! You'll be buried in that rotting mass!"

"No. This creature has told me that when one of her species dies, a reflex opens the labia. That's to permit their young—if any—to escape. Listen, I'll—"

A tentacle coiled about him and pulled him back through the iris, which shut.

When he switched back to C.W., he heard, "Why didn't you communicate? What were you doing? Tell me! Tell me!"

Eddie told her. There was a silence that could only be interpreted as astonishment. After she'd recovered her wits, she said, "From now on, you will talk to the other male through me."

Obviously, she envied and hated his ability to change wavebands, and, perhaps, had a struggle to accept the idea.

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It was outré.

"Please," he persisted, not knowing how dangerous were the waters he was wading in, "please let me talk to my mother di—"

For the first time, he heard her stutter.

"Wha-wha-what? Your Mo-Mo-Mother?"

"Yes. Of course."

The floor heaved violently beneath his feet. He cried out and braced himself to keep from falling and then flashed on the light. The walls were pulsating like shaken jelly, and the vascular columns had turned from red and blue to gray. The entrance-iris sagged open, like a lax mouth, and the air cooled. He could feel the drop in temperature in her flesh with the soles of his feet.

It was some time before he caught on.

Polyphema was in a state of shock.

What might have happened had she stayed in it, he never knew. She might have died and thus forced him out into the winter before his mother could escape. If so, and he couldn't find the ship, he would die. Huddled in the warmest corner of the egg-shaped chamber, Eddie contemplated that idea and shivered to a degree the outside air couldn't account for.

VII

HOWEVER, Polyphema had her own method of recovery. It consisted of spewing out the contents of her stew-stomach, which had doubtless become filled with the poisons draining out of her system from the blow. Her ejection of the stuff was the physical manifestation of the psychical catharsis. So furious was the flood that her foster son was almost swept out in the hot tide, but she, reacting instinctively, had coiled tentacles about him and the Sluggos. Then she followed the first upchucking by emptying her other three water-pouches, the second hot and the third lukewarm and the fourth, just filled, cold.

Eddie yelped as the icy water doused him.

Polyphema's irises closed again. The floor and walls gradually quit quaking; the temperature rose; and her veins and arteries regained their red and blue. She was well again. Or so she seemed.

But when, after waiting twenty-four hours, he cautiously approached the subject, he found she not only would not talk about it, she refused to acknowledge the existence of the other mobile.

Eddie, giving up the hopes of conversation, thought for quite a while. The only conclusion he could come to, and he was sure he'd grasped enough of her psychology to make it valid, was that the concept of a mobile female was utterly unacceptable.

Her world was split into two: mobile and her kind, the immoble. Mobile meant food and mating. Mobile meant —male. The Mothers were—female.

How the mobiles reproduced had probably never entered the hillcrouchers' minds. Their science and philosophy were on the instinctive body-level. Whether they had some notion of spontaneous generation or amoeba-like fission being responsible for the continued population of mobiles, or they'd just taken for granted they "growed," like Topsy, Eddie never found out. To them, they were female and the rest of the protoplasmic cosmos was male.

That was that. Any other idea was more than foul and obscene and blasphemous. It was—unthinkable.

So that Polyphema had received a deep trauma from his words. And though she seemed to have recovered, somewhere in those tons of unimaginably complicated flesh a bruise was buried. Like a hidden flower, dark purple, it bloomed , and the shadow it cast was one that cut off a certain memory, a certain tract, from the light of consciousness. That bruise-stained shadow covered that time and event which the Mother, for reasons unfathomable to the human being, found necessary to mark KEEP OFF.

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Thus, though Eddie did not word it, he understood in the cells of his body, he felt and knew, as if his bones were prophesying and his brain did not hear, what came to pass.

Sixty-six hours later by the panrad clock, Polyphema's entrance-lips opened. Her tentacles darted out. They came back in, carrying his helpless and struggling mother.

Eddie, roused out of a doze, horrified, paralyzed, saw her toss her lab kit at him and heard an inarticulate cry from her. And saw her plunged, headforemost, into the stomach-iris.

Polyphema had taken the one sure way of burying the evidence.

EDDIE lay face down, nose mashed against the warm and faintly throbbing flesh of the floor. Now and then his hands clutched spasmodically as if he were reaching for something that someone kept putting just within his reach and then moving away.

How long he was there, he didn't know, for he never again looked at the clock.

Finally, in the darkness, he sat up and giggled, inanely, "Mother always did make good stew."

That set him off. He leaned back on his hands and threw his head back and howled like a wolf under a full moon.

Polyphema, of course, was dead-deaf, but she could radar his posture, and her keen nostrils deduced from his body-scent that he was in a terrible fear and anguish.

A tentacle glided out and gently enfolded him.

"What is the matter?" zzted the panrad.

He stuck his finger in the keyhole.

"I have lost my mother!"

"?"

"She's gone away, and she'll never come back."

"I don't understand. *Here I am.*"

Eddie quit weeping and cocked his head as if he were listening to some inner voice. He snuffled a few times and wiped away the tears, slowly disengaged the tentacle, patted it, walked over to his pack in a corner, and took out the bottle of Old Red Star capsules. One he popped into the thermos; the other he gave to her with the request she duplicate it, if possible. Then he stretched out on his side, propped on one elbow, like a Roman in his sensualities, sucked the rye through the nipple, and listened to the medley of Beethoven, Moussorgsky, Verdi, Strauss, Porter, Casals, Feinstein, and Waxworth.

So the time—if there were such a thing there—flowed around Eddie. When he was tired of music or plays or books, he listened in on the area hook-up. Hungry, he rose and walked—or often just crawled—to the stew-iris. Cans of rations lay in his pack; he had planned to eat on those until he was sure that—what was it he was forbidden to eat? Poison? Something had been devoured by Polyphema and the Sluggos. But sometime during the music-rye orgy, he had forgotten. He now ate quite hungrily and with thought for nothing but the satisfaction of his wants.

Sometimes the door-iris opened, and Billy Greengrocer hopped in. Billy looked like a cross between a cricket and a kangaroo. He was the size of a collie, and he bore in a marsupalian pouch vegetables and fruit and nuts. These he extracted with shiny green, chitinous claws and gave to Mother in return for meals of stew. Happy symbiote, he chirruped merrily while his many-faceted eyes, revolving independently of each other, looked one at the Sluggos and the other at Eddie.

Eddie, on impulse, abandoned the 1000 kc. band and roved the frequencies until he found that both Polyphema and Billy were emitting a 108 wave. That, apparently, was their natural signal. When Billy had his groceries to deliver, he broadcast. Polyphema, in turn, when she needed them, sent back to him. There was nothing intelligent on Billy's part; it was just his instinct to trans-

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mit. And the Mother was, aside from the "semantic" frequency, limited to that one band. But it worked out fine.

VIII

EVERYTHING was fine. What more could a man want? Free food, unlimited liquor, soft bed, air-conditioning, showerbaths music, intellectual works (on the tape), interesting conversations (much of it was about him), privacy, and security.

If he had not already named her, he would have called her Mother Gratis.

Nor were creature comforts all. She had given him the answers to all his questions, all. . . .

Except one.

That was never expresed vocally by him. Indeed, he would have been incapable of doing so. He was probably unaware that he had such a question.

But Polyphema voiced it one day when she asked him to do her a favor.

Eddie reacted as if outraged.

"One does not—! One does not—!"

He choked and then he thought, how ridiculous! She is not—

And looked puzzled, and said, "But she is."

He rose and opened the lab kit. While he was looking for a scalpel, he came across the carcinogens. Without thinking about it, he threw them through the half-opened labia far out and down the hillside.

Then he turned and, scalpel in hand, leaped at the light grey swelling on the wall. And stopped; staring at it, while the instrument fell from his hand. And picked it up and stabbed feebly and did not even scratch the skin. And again let it drop.

"What is it? What is it?" crackled the panrad hanging from his wrist.

Suddenly, a heavy cloud of human odor—mansweat—was puffed in his face from a nearby vent.

"? ? ? ?"

And he stood, bent in a half-crouch, seemingly paralyzed. Until tentacles seized him in fury and dragged him towards the stomach-iris, yawning man-sized.

Eddie screamed and writhed and plunged his finger in the panrad and tapped, "All right! All right!"

AND once back before the spot, he lunged with a sudden and wild joy; he slashed savagely; he yelled. "Take that! And that, P . . ." and the rest was lost in a mindless shout.

He did not stop cutting, and he might have gone on and on until he had quite excised the spot had not Polyphema interfered by dragging him towards her stomach-iris again. For ten seconds he hung there, helpless and sobbing with a strange mixture of fear and glory.

Polyphema's reflexes had almost overcome her brain. Fortunately, a cold spark of reason lit up a corner of the vast, dark, and hot chapel of her frenzy.

The convolutions leading to the steaming, meat-laden pouch closed and the foldings of flesh rearranged themselves. Eddie was suddenly hosed with warm water from what he called the "sanitation" stomach. The iris closed. He was put down. The scalpel was put back in the bag.

For a long time Mother seemed to be shaken by the thought of what she might have done Eddie. She did not trust herself to transmit until her nerves were settled. When she did, she did not refer to his narrow escape. Nor did he.

He was happy. He felt as if a spring, tight-coiled against his bowels since he and his wife had parted, was now, for some reason, sprung. The dull vague pain of loss and discontent, the slight fever and cramp in his entrails and apathy that sometimes afflicted him, were gone. He felt fine.

Meanwhile, something akin to deep affection had been lighted, like a tiny candle under the drafty and overtowering roof of a cathedral. Mother's shell housed more than Eddie; it now curved over an emotion new to her kind. This was evident by the next event that filled

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him with terror.

For the wounds in the spot healed and the swelling increased into a large bag. Then the bag burst and ten mouse-sized Sluggos struck the floor. The impact had the same effect as a doctor's spanking a newborn baby's bottom; they drew in their first breath with shock and pain: their uncontrolled and feeble pulses filled the ether with shapeless SOS's.

When Eddie was not talking with Polyphema or listening in or drinking or sleeping or eating or bathing or running off the tape, he played with the Sluggos. He was, in a sense, their father. Indeed, as they grew to hog-size, it was hard for their female parent to distinguish him from her young. As he seldom walked any more, and was often to be found on hands and knees in their midst, she could not scan him too well. Moreover, something in the heavywet air or in the diet had caused every hair on his body to drop off. He grew very fat. Generally speaking, he was one with the pale, soft, round, and bald offspring. A family likeness.

There was one difference. When the time came for the virgins to be expelled, Eddie crept to one end, whimpering, and stayed there until he was sure Mother was not going to thrust him out into the cold, hard, and hungry world.

That final crisis over, he came back to the center of the floor. The panic in his breast had died out, but his nerves were still quivering. He filled his thermos and then listened for a while to his own baritone singing the *Sea Things* aria from his favorite opera, Gianelli's *Ancient Mariner*. Suddenly he burst out and accompanied himself, finding himself thrilled as never before by the concluding words.

And from my neck so free
The Albatross fell off, and sank
Like lead into the sea.

Afterwards, voice silent but heart singing, he switched off the wire and cut in on Polyphema's broadcast.

Mother was having trouble. She could not precisely describe to the continent-wide hook-up this new and almost inexpressible emotion she felt about the mobile. It was a concept her language was not prepared for. Nor was she helped any by the gallons of Old Red Star in her bloodstream.

Eddie sucked at the plastic nipple and nodded sympathetically and drowsily at her search for words. Presently, the thermos rolled out of his hand.

He slept on his side, curled in a ball, knees on his chest and arms crossed, neck bent forward. Like the pilot room chronometer whose hands reversed after the crash, the clock of his body was ticking backwards, ticking backwards . . .

In the darkness, in the moistness, safe and warm, well fed, well loved.

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He almost reached the hatch opening when there was a gust of wind

Delirium on Deneb

By ROLF MARTELL

Horga learned the secret of the deadly dust—but he had no knowledge of how it would hit him

JON HORGA, big, bulky and space-tanned, sat alone in the spaceport bar, nursing the last drink he could buy. He savagely ground out his blue Venusian cigar and felt the single orange credit note in his jacket pocket. Tomorrow, he knew, a space patrol blacklist would be thrown at him for suspected wrecking, and he'd be grounded

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for good. Horga, though he burned with anger, was not badly worried. Flush with credits or broke, he'd always landed on his feet, because he'd always been a little harder and more ruthless than his enemies. And everyone —man or humanoid—he considered his potential enemy.

He gave little attention to the bargirls in their short, provocative skirts, the crew members or the rocket mechanics who wandered past his table. But his cold blue eyes narrowed as he saw the old spaceman stagger towards him. Horga judged he was a prospector just back from a long star trip. He had the look of money—a stake that Horga needed badly right now.

Horga shoved out the chair on the opposite side of his table and gestured toward it. The old man, his eyes a little vacant, smiled and dropped into the chair.

"Just blasted in?" Horga asked.

"Yeah—burned it in at 1800—and as glad as I've ever been to get back to a world with a drink. Three months out and back to Deneb ain't a picnic, ever, but this time if it wasn't for luck it would've been my last run, just like it was for my partner." In answer to the old man's gesture, the waitress appeared with drinks—Alkursch. His hand trembled a bit as he downed his drink in a gulp.

Horga extended his big, radiation-burned hand across the table. "I'm Jon Horga," he said, "just off the Arcturan Queen. Blaster's Mate First. Sounds to me like you got quite a yarn."

The old man's bleary eyes focused slowly. There was a hint of suspicion in them, but the desire for companionship after lonely weeks in space was stronger. He shoved out his hand. "Mine's Barnabus," he said. "Whatever the rest of it was, guess I left it behind, a few million light-years back."

The old man gestured for more drinks, paying off with a bill pealed from a fat roll. "It's a yarn, all right—one of the kind, son, that they say you gotta give out to the space patrol boys if you want to keep your star papers. And I figure that's where I'd better be headed now, while I still got half a synapse working." The old man started to get up, but Horga laid a friendly hand on his arm.

"Barnabus, old boy, I know the patrol has listened to a lot of wild tales—some of them true—but they have a way of discounting about ninety percent what starboys like us say when we wander in with a jetload of Alkursch—and they're just as likely as not to slap a detain on you with an h.t.s. ticket—hold till sober."

Barnabus slumped back in his chair. For a moment he stared at Horga, the Alkursch showing in his eyes. Finally, he shook himself and muttered, "Son, I guess you got a point. Very same thing happened to me once out on Vega IV—very same thing you just said. Guess what I need is some coffee."

Barnabus twisted in his chair and familiarly patted the hip of a passing waitress. "Coffee for me and my friend," he said in fluent, ungrammatical Aldeberan, "and a double order of toasted *pultischtoz*."

AS THE waitress flashed her standard smile and left to fill the order, Horga leaned forward and began to talk rapidly to Barnabus, telling him of the day-long battle he once had with aliens—p i r a t e s in the Magellenics. While he talked, his hands were busy under the table. His right hand slipped along the links of his life-bracelet, past the life-radio, past the sustenance link, with food and water substitute for a month; past the antibody link, the location that automatically gave star coordinates—past these and three similar links to his own special link. He worked the three tiny butt[illegible] and the knob in proper sequence and rhythm and the cover of the link sprang open. Carefully, the index finger of his right hand slipped into the cavity and he caught a tiny capsule under his fingernail.

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All this time, he continued with his story. ". . . and, then, when we were disabled, they began to board us. As a last resort, we'd let them think we were all dead. But when they burned their way in, at the stern quarter, we were waiting. I had the trigger-box of the Easton, and I'll always remember the first one that came in through the smoking hole they'd made. He looked—well—if you take a look at that picture behind you, over the bar, you'll get some idea . . . "

As old Barnabus glanced behind him at the picture, Horga's right hand shot out over the coffee, and the tension in his finger relaxed just enough to let the capsule drop into the cup. . . .

Barnabus wondered vaguely why the coffee and the *pultischtoz* didn't help. He kept talking and talking, feeling drunker all the time . . . he hadn't planned to go on this way, but he told how he and his partner had landed out on Deneb IV, hit a rich vein of Thoralite and loaded up. Then, almost by accident, they had stumbled across the meteorite caves with their lichens that no one, through all of space, had ever seen before. How his partner had attempted to analyze the lichens and the strange blue powder they exuded. And how, when his partner fused the powder in the spectroscope . . . .

"It was a nightmare," Barnabus went on. "After it hit him, he was convinced he was surrounded by girls—dozens of them, Earth girls, Venusians, Aldebarans—doing anything he wanted. He *knew* they were there. And I guess they were, to him. And money, liquor, food—anything and everything. The hallucinations went on for hours. Suddenly, they stopped. Then he just sat, eyes wide open, blank, staring.

I kept watching him for quite awhile and finally I said, 'Bill, why don't you come off it?' His face doesn't change expression at all. He'd been sitting on the bunk but then, more like a servo than a man, he stands up and . . . and . . . just waits! I still don't know what's happening, y'understand—I think Bill's trying to give me the business. So I'm disgusted—remember, I ain't a space medic. So I said, disgusted-like, 'Look, Bill, it's time we blasted off. It's time you quit this routine. Fun's fun, and all that, but we got to leave.' So he just stands there, with the same fishy eyes, no expression at all. So finally—I'm getting mad now you see—I say, 'Bill, snap out of it or go take a flying leap for yourself.'"

OLD BARNABUS took a long drink of coffee and went on. "We had a K-72-Y—you know the kind of ship—there's a sixty foot drop from the main hatch to the ground. So, when I pulled that 'flying leap' line, Bill happened to be standing nearer to the open hatch than I was. Before I figured what was going on, he'd taken four big steps over to the hatch. Then he looked over at me, as if he wanted my approval. Before I had a chance to say a word, he faced back to the open hatch. I saw his knees bend, then suddenly straighten, and his body shot out. He was gone. There was nothing but sky showing in the hatch."

Barnabus shuddered and poured the rest of the coffee down his throat. "I dashed over to the hatch and looked down. Yeah—there was what was left of Bill—sixty feet below. Smashed to a pulp on the rocks."

Barnabus wiped a thin hand across his mouth. "As I climbed down the ladder, I figured out, more or less, what had happened. Stupid of me not to have caught on sooner. The stuff he'd been testing—must have been a narcotic that we never heard of—set him off in dreams first, and then put him in a state so that he'd do *anything* I said. The flame in the spectroscope set it off—guess the stuff has to be in vapor form to take effect. But, to make sure, before I buried Bill, I took some blood samples. After I ran the Anderson test on them, I was sure. Turned out to be Anderson Rd-7: permanent addiction with no

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known counteragents. Rough stuff. Makes a man just about one hundred per cent suggestible to anybody, permanently."

Jon Horga's eyes glittered as he offered a cigar to the old man. Here was a stake—a stake bigger than he'd ever dreamed of having. With this drug—what was the old fool saying—the natives called it *locada*—he would have anything—*anything*—he wanted. First, he'd enslave a rich man, to give him the capital he would need at the beginning. Next, technicians and rocket men. Then, hundreds, thousands, tens of thousands more for every purpose, every whim. With *locada* he could be the absolute master of a planet, a whole system, finally, perhaps, the galaxy! His eyes were watchful as he regarded the old man. Already he could see that the little white capsule was taking effect. The old man was still babbling on, but his eyes were drooping. His head refused to stay erect. His speech was thicker. Horga watched and waited. Seconds later, in the middle of a sentence, the old man's head suddenly fell to the permacloth tabletop.

IT HAD been easy, Horga thought. A little pill, but a big dose. Then, with old Barnabus out on his feet, a matter of paying off the port fees with Barnabus' own credits, a small bribe to the driver of the port jeep who took them out to the ship, then the blast-off. Of course, he'd had to throw a paralyzer beam on the old fool, to keep him happy in hyperspace. And now, he thought, with Deneb bright in front of him, it was time to nick old Barney with a touch of Scop 7-0-8 to get the truth out of him on the position of the *locada* caverns.

He switched in the planet radar and picked up Deneb IV. Ignoring the rules of the space manual, he threw the ship into an FTL "shummer" and immediately slapped it back out. Zero time had passed and he was on the orbit of IV, tailing it a few thousand. Flicks of the rear jets, scherzo manipulations of the auxiliaries. Cancel out the anti-grav, pull the tape from the evaluator, feed masses and velocities into the Compumaster, sling the ship into an orbit, and that's that. Compumaster would take care of the next hour of spiraling in.

Jon Horga stepped out of the pilot seat, filled the Scop needle, and walked back to Barnabus, paralyzed on his couch. Barnabus glared up at him in helpless, frustrated anger as Horga shot the needle home. It was the most powerful truth drug known, though its average effect lasted for only four minutes twenty seconds. But time enough. In three minutes, Horga knew the landing area, azimuth and distance to the *locada* deposits. Plus: characteristics of the humanoid natives, flora, topography, atmosphere, this-and-that for survival.

Horga smiled with satisfaction and pushed his big bulk back into the pilot's compartment. He thought over the characteristics of the *Tzenn*, the humanoid natives old Barnabus had mentioned. Physically, he had said, they looked human, more or less, but their metabolism was silicon-based, rather than carbon-based, and among their organs was a special silicon-lined ductless gland, containing almost pure phosphorous, which their systems required in relatively large quantities in order to handle the very complex vitamin molecules found in their food supply.

These *Tzenn* should be easy to deal with, Horga decided. The old man had described them as docile, primitive folk, blue skinned, living almost naked in the tropical heat of their planet. They subsisted on the few simple crops they grew. Horga frowned as he recalled that old Barnabus had also said they had a religious tabu strictly prohibiting anyone from entering the *locada* caves. Then he smiled grimly. His needle gun had solved the problem of more than one religious taboo before, among savages.

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As the ship spiraled in, Jon Horga set the co-ordinates that Barnabus had been forced to give him into the lat-lon dial. He watched as they passed over a turgid, algae-choked sea, countless miles of dense tropical jungle, and finally the foothills of enormous, rugged mountains. Horga took over from the Compumaster and brought the ship down on the same rock-strewn clearing where Barnabus had landed before. It was a good landing, with the nose of the ship pointed straight up, the three tail fins resting on rock in the center of the clearing.

After checking his needle gun, Horga started for the hatch. He grinned at Barnabus as he passed him. "Soon as I'm back with the *locada* dust, you'll have the honor of becoming the first slave in the empire of Horga I."

Old Barnabus glared in helpless rage as Horga opened the hatch and began to climb down the sixty feet to the surface.

HORGA tramped through the hot, steaming jungle, watching for the landmarks he had forced Barnabus to give him. Flying reptiles whirred past overhead, and noises around him indicated that the jungle was full of other forms of life—and death. As the path turned abruptly, Horga suddenly stopped short and drew back.

At his feet, hungrily reaching for him with enormous claws, was a creature with a slug-like body, fully six feet long. It lay across a blue, rotten log in the path and sunlight sparkled, reflected from the compound eyes in its iridescent head. The claws shot out at Horga and snapped viciously again, this time ripping his coveralls and just missing his leg. For all its torpid aspect, the thing was amazingly fast and agile. Horga threw himself back, his needle gun flashing up out of its holster and into action. Instantly, the thing on the log was black, charred ash. Horga stepped over it and continued, a smile of satisfaction on his face.

He crossed a narrow, rapid stream, leaping from one stone to another, careful to avoid the orange, poisonous lancefish flashing through the water beneath him. Then the jungle began to thin out as the path climbed into the foothills, and the ground became more rocky. Under the glaring rays of the young hot sun, Horga sweated as he doggedly pushed on, up the rugged path.

As he rounded an enormous boulder, he saw his first natives on the hillside ahead. There were two of the *Tzenn*, roughly humanoid, but taller and thinner than men, with glistening blue skins. Each carried a long, crudely fashioned hunting spear. As they saw him, they began chattering excitedly to each other in high, squeaking voices. Horga had his needle gun ready as he advanced toward them, but they retreated off the path into the brush at his approach. As he strode on across the rugged hillside, he heard the *Tzenn* scampering along behind him, squeaking in their strange, high-pitched language. Over his shoulder he could catch an occasional glimpse of them, loping through the brush or across the rocks, with sunlight glistening on their bare blue skins. Horga felt a vague annoyance and irrtation at the *Tzenn*. Stupid creatures, he thought contemptuously, and apparently harmless. Of course, they might not be so harmless when he broke their taboo—he'd seen native races turned into murderous frenzy when their religion was offended—but the needle gun would take care of them, as it had before with others who had ben stupid enough to get in his way.

He came at last to the canyon opening that Barnabus had spoken of, with sheer cliffs rising at each side—almost the end of his journey. As he walked into the canyon, past the rock walls on either side, the thin squeaking of the *Tzenn* behind him seemed to grow more excited. Horga guessed that this must be the beginning of the forbidden country. He held his needle gun ready and

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turned it up to full intensity. If the stupid fools asked for trouble, he was ready to give it to them. He strode on. The canyon widened into a barren, rock-strewn floor, hundreds of feet in width, surrounded by sheer walls. At his approach a flying reptile stretched its leathery, green scaled wings and clumsily began to circle into the air.

The needle gun in Horga's hand crackled and the stricken creature seemed to hesitate in mid-air. Then, head downward, its useless wing broken and fluttering, it plunged back to the rocky canyon floor. It thudded among the razor-sharp rocks, trailing a thin plume of smoke. As Horga passed the dying bird, he kicked it with loathing and continued on.

NOW his steps quickened and he hurried forward eagerly. Ahead of him, at the base of the canyon wall, he saw the *locada* caverns—the source of limitless power and wealth, the source of slaves to do his bidding, to supply all the things he would ever need or want. An empire of trapped minds! He scrambled over the sharp rocks, ignoring cuts and scratches. At last he clambered over the final tumbled heap of boulders and reached the mouth of the first cavern.

Bending his head, he stepped into the cavern mouth and switched on his light. The cavern at first was narrow, sloping gently downward, lined with wet bare rock. Abruptly, the path curved sharply and then suddenly ended. There was nothing under his feet—a black pit!

Horga barely managed to avoid falling by catching a handhold on an outcropping of rock. He stepped back and pointed his light into the black pit. Twenty feet below him was the floor of a natural oval room. Drops of lime-soaked water glistened in the light of the torch along the walls of the chamber. Horga shivered in the damp canyon after the burning heat of the day outside. He shivered with cold, but he shivered with excitement too, because on every ledge, on every surface, blue, delicate lichens were growing. And on each of the growing surfaces, on the surrounding rock, on the floor of the cavern itself, there were heaps of blue dust—enough *locada* for hundreds of addicts, in this one cavern alone!

Eyes glinting with anticipation, Jon Horga began to lower himself carefully to the floor of the cavern, finding footholds and handholds in water-seamed crevices. Reaching the solid footing of the canyon floor, he was careful to avoid disturbing any of the heaps of dust. Taking flexible containers from his pack, he began to gather the fine, talc-like dust.

He worked steadily, packing pound after pound into his expansible plasti-bag, oblivious to his surroundings and the passage of time. He had almost filled it when the sense of danger which had enabled him to survive in battles against desperate men and aliens in a hundred systems, brought him back to the immediate scene, all senses alert.

Horga whirled, causing little eddies of dust in the dank air. As his eyes went up, he first saw a pair of blue *Tzenn* legs, arms akimbo, at the mouth of the black passageway. Horga raised his eyes, looking at the *Tzenn*, who had a spear poised in his muscular right hand.

The *Tzenn's* head was encased in a grotesque reptilian mask, topped with bright plumage. Priest . . . medicine man . . . someone who can enter the forbidden place . . . the ideas flashed automatically through Horga's mind as he raised the needle gun.

In the light of the torch, he saw the muscles tensing in the arm of the *Tzenn*. Horga squeezed the trigger and dropped flat on the canyon floor. Bright orange flashed through black space at the same instant that the *Tzenn's* spear flashed through the air, inches above Horga's head. Horga looked up. The *Tzenn* still stood, swaying in agony, his right arm burned to the bone. Grimly, with a slight smile, Horga aimed the needle gun at the sternum. Pressing the trig-

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ger, he methodically burned the *Tzenn*, cutting a deadly line of fire from his thorax to his groin. Still the masked *Tzenn* stood erect, as life left him. Then, with the tremble of a dead, dried-out leaf, he fell.

And as he fell, he flamed.

Jon Horga backed away in terror, scattering great clouds of dust as he stumbled through the lichen-heaps. The body continued to burn, great clouds of thick white smoke rising from it, filling the cavern. Suddenly Horga knew what must have happened—he had hit the *Tzenn's* phosphorous gland with his needle ray—and Horga knew that phosphorous would continue to burn fiercely until it was completely consumed. He had to get out—fast!

Horga stumbled through the thick smoke, coughing and almost blinded. He fell twice before he was able to reach the cavern wall and begin climbing. In his wild haste, he ignored the blood streaming from cuts on his face and hands. A fingernail ripped on a sharp projection on the wall, but Horga did not stop for an instant as he clawed his way up the passageway. Anything, anything to get out!

At last, Horga's bleeding fingers felt the passageway opening over his head. Exerting all his remaining strength, he pulled himself up to the level passageway surface. Gasping for breath in the phosphorous poisoned atmosphere, he switched on his light. The light was worse than useless as a guide—it showed only the clouds of smoke that filled the cavern. Horga was about to throw it aside when he noticed that the smoke had changed. It had been the pure white of burning phosphorous—now it was definitely blue. The *locada* dust was vaporizing in the fierce flame of the burning phosphorous!

LOST completely to panic, Horga ran, ran headlong up the dark, smoke-filled passage. His foot hit a projecting rock and he fell heavily. He scrambled to his feet, and half crouching, his eyes full of burning tears from the phosphorous, he dashed on toward the cavern mouth. Seconds later, he saw a bright shaft of sunlight pierce the smoke. He forced himself to a last mad burst of speed and then he was outside. He collapsed across the rocks near the cavern mouth, feeling the welcome heat of Deneb on his lacerated shoulders and back, breathing in fresh air at last, instead of deadly smoke.

Minutes later, he forced himself to his feet. Painfully, he picked his way among the rocks and boulders, down to the canyon floor. As he walked across the canyon he wondered desperately if he had got out in time. Had the drug had time to take effect? At least, there were no addict's dreams, no hallucinations—yet.

He went on doggedly, across the hillside, back down toward the jungle and the ship. Off in the brush to the side of the path, he caught fleeting glimpses of the *Tzenn*—just a flash of movement, a hint of blue skin, and it would be gone. And, as the wind shifted, it brought to him the squeaking chatter of their high thin voices. Did they seem to be laughing at him? There seemed to be a different, mocking tone in their incessant talk. Or was it just the distortion of the wind—or his own imagination?

Angrily, he dismissed the idea and gripped his needle gun more tightly. This was only a temporary defeat. When he returned to the caves, he would know how to deal with the *Tzenn*. Kill them. Kill them in the open air, if they got in his way. And set a neutronic trap in the cavern mouths, to kill them before they could get inside. No, he wasn't defeated yet.

He smiled grimly and continued on toward the clearing. Already, through the tangled vines and matted jungle growths, he could begin to make out the straight clean lines of the ship ahead.

He broke into the clearing and ran to the ship. Painfully, he began the sixty foot climb to the hatch, gingerly

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grasping the rungs with his torn fingers. He had almost reached the hatch opening when there was a sudden gust of wind. He froze to the rungs, swaying slightly. As the wind dropped, he started to reach for the next rung. But then it dissolved, before his eyes!

In sudden panic, he locked his fingers in a death grip on the rung he could no longer see. But there was an odd numbness in his fingers, his whole body. Only in a vague, unreal way could he feel the ship, next to his body. And as he looked, the ship's solid form melted, ran in liquid metal around him, swirled in clouds of gleaming vapor, boiled in a thick grey fevered chaos around him, and then . . . .

Nothing.

Nothing at all. No space and no time. No extension or dimension. No form. No place and no sense. No tactile-auditory-visual-olfactory-gustatory. No repulsion or attraction. No desire.

Except:

In the dead emptiness that had been the ego, a perception of a *loss*. Whose perception? Don't know. And where? There is no where. No when, no what.

And then, from the void that had been his mind, the thin fabric of hallucination began to form. At first—only the hint of a vibration—a motion—a wave through nothing. And then, high and clear, a bell-like note that echoed across and through the synapses of his brain, and became—*color* . . . an alien spectrum of a hundred brilliant hues that shifted, melted, mixed and blended before his eyes . . . and then burst into the light of a thousand suns! And it all came. Form and distance, personality, space, desire and time. A world for him to live in . . . all false? Gasping with relief, he reached out for it . . .

A tall, golden skinned girl was at his side. With a serene quiet smile she handed him a tall glass, filled with something amber. He drank, and as he did a wave of desire for life overwhelmed him. Wonderingly, he ran his hands along the body of the girl, feeling the pulse of life beneath her firm skin . . . this false? Angrily rejecting the half-formed doubt, he r u d e l y grasped the girl and pulled her to him, lusting for her, lusting for reality . . . .

TIME lost all existence, blending into infinity. There were other girls—Earth girls, Centaurans, princesses from Arcturus, girls from planets he did not know, from worlds that had no name. There were short, sharp nightmares, succeeded by the almost unbearable sensation of infinite power—omnipotence. Whole suns, whole galaxies were his, to bend and turn, stop and start, at any whim, and worlds that man would never see. But, as he tramped across his star-strewn universe, the hint of something off-key, something false, returned, stronger than before. Not real? False? He tried to reject the idea, to twist and turn away from it, but it returned and it was with him . . . false . . . *false* . . . FALSE!

With a tremendous mental effort, he forced his twisted brain back to reality. The first thing he saw was his hand, caked with blood, numb from gripping the rail above his head. And then the smooth metal of the ship, inches from his eyes.

He looked down and felt a stomach-turning vertigo that almost made him lose his grip. How long had he hung there, lost in the narcotic dream? It must have been hours, for the long black shadows extending across the clearing indicated that the long Deneb day was ending.

A wave of loathing overcame him. This could not be his world . . . this was the dream . . . the other world, the real world, his own world . . . he would return to it. With a feeling of infinite relief, he began to drift back. But some tenuous shred of sanity forced him to stop. I must climb, he thought dimly. Why did he have to climb? He did not know, could not remember. But a last spark of determination flamed momentarily into life and he raised one foot,

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leadenly. He almost lost his hold as his cramped arm reached for the next rung and missed. Then he was up, his head level with the open hatch. One more effort. Just one more. Gathering all his strength, he pushed himself upward and collapsed across the floor of the hatchway.

ACROSS the compartment, Barnabus waited and watched, his old body still held in the paralyzer beam. Through the interminable hours of the long Deneb day he had waited, at first patiently, then with growing anxiety, as he considered three factors. First, in the weeks of prospecting here before, he had come across a dying *Tzenn*, had watched the body burst into flame as the membrane of the phosphorous gland broke down. Next, he had been impressed by the psychological hold their taboos had for them. And finally, he knew Horga was the type to shoot, at the first hint of danger. Horga, a twisted man who basically hated all other men, all other living creatures. But, if it happened as Barnabus thought it might, would Horga be able to get back to the ship before the drug took effect? If not, Barnabus would remain locked in the unbreakable grip of the paralyzer, until hunger and thirst had killed him.

It was with great relief that Barnabus heard the ring of Horga's boots outside the ship, mounting toward the hatch. But then, almost at the top, they had stopped, and for hours there was no sound. What had happened? Had Horga fallen? Was he lost forever in *locada* fantasies? Barnabus had resigned himself to slow, lingering death when at last Horga's head appeared at the hatch.

His first feeling was enormous relief. Then other thoughts went through his mind as he regarded the unconscious figure of Horga. Jon Horga, now a mind with no control, a willing slave to any suggestion.

If he returned to the spaceports, was there any limit to the evil he would do? Suggest a murder, Horga would commit it, without a single independent thought, without a trace of conscience. A robbery, a pirate attack—anything. And Barnabus knew that there were many, many men in the raw life of the space-towns, who would take advantage of just such an opportunity. And—a peril to the entire galaxy—one of them would be sure to pry from Horga the source of the deadly dust. A cure was now impossible. But if, some time in some way, a cure might be found? No, the risk was too great. And even if Horga might be cured, he was still, even when "normal," a dangerous man, the enemy of all other men, a killer many times over. Barnabus knew what he had to do.

"Get up!" he commanded.

Horga painfully raised his head. His eyes were blank—empty of volition or individuality. The drug was master now.

"Turn off the paralyzer beam!"

Without expression, Horga got to his feet and hobbled to the banked controls. Autmatically, he flipped the switches off. Then he waited, motionless.

Freed, Barnabus stood up, rubbing circulation back into his numbed legs and arms.

"This is the last," he said, "that mankind will ever see of *locada*." He looked up at the addict. "To make sure of that, Horga, I've got to say the same thing to you I said to my partner. It wasn't very funny then, and it sure isn't now. I didn't know what I was doing then—but I do now."

He said softly, "Horga, go take a flying leap!"

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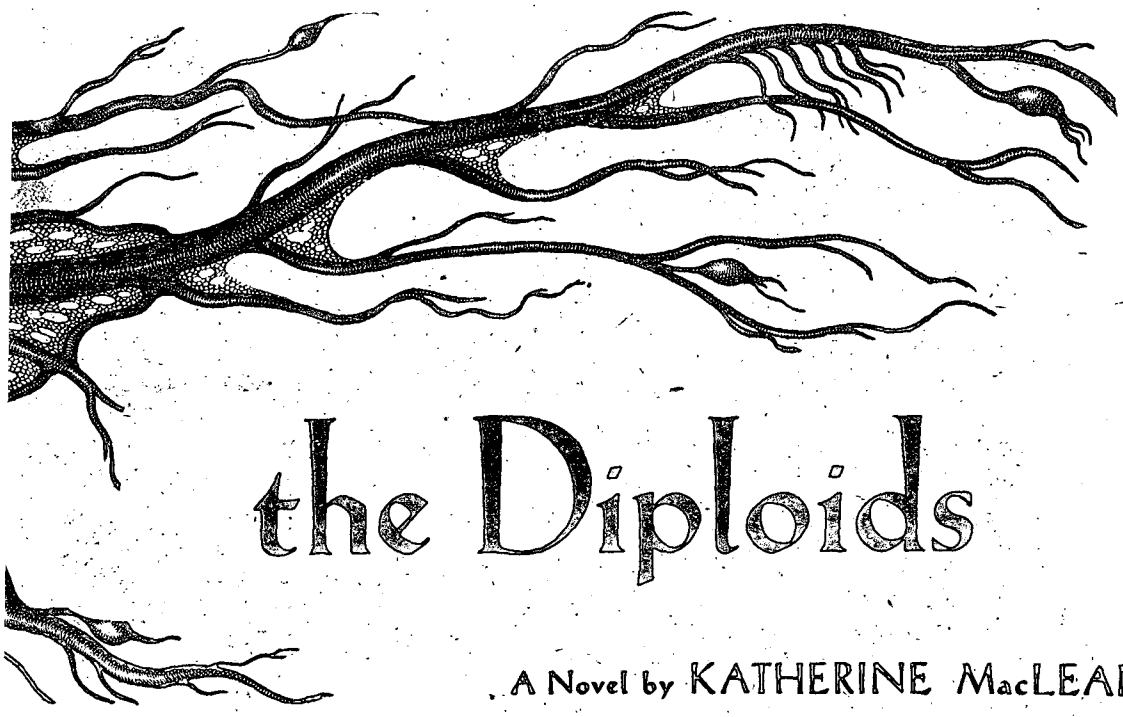


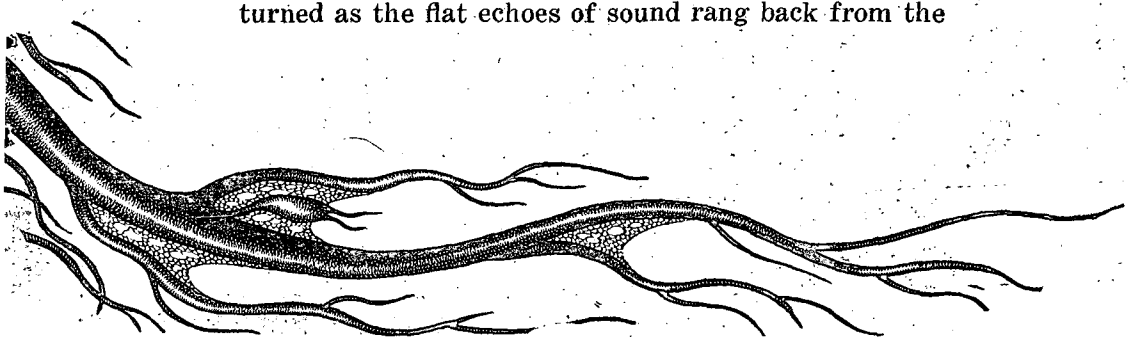
the Diploids

A Novel by KATHERINE MacLEAN

He had to backtrack his own heredity before he could find out whether he was a freak or a superman

I

"LOOK out!" The shout was almost in his ear, and with the shout came another sound, a flat crack like two boards slapping together. He moved instinctively, grasping Nadine's arm and making three rapid strides to the shelter of a store doorway. Then he turned as the flat echoes of sound rang back from the



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stone fronts of the buildings across the street. He expected to see something fallen from a window, or a car out of control veering up over the curb.

At first glance there was nothing. The traffic moved by silently and swiftly as usual, but the people on the sidewalk milled oddly, and then straightened to stare all in one direction down the street. The light had changed a few seconds ago, and the traffic sped by more rapidly, accelerating.

He picked out voices.

"Did you get his number?"

"Some nut waving a gun from a taxi."

"But he shot at us!"

He glanced at Nadine; they exchanged a half shrug and walked on.

Then "Mart" Breden remembered that something had brushed his neck roughly as he heard the shout. He had assumed it was the sleeve of a waving arm but. . . .

"So as I was saying—" he continued stubbornly, determined to finish a half-finished witty point. While he spoke he put his fingertips up to feel the spot on his neck, then brought them down again. There was a dampness on his neck and a red smear of color on his fingertips . . . blood.

Nadine halted. "As you were saying, brother—you're just too dumb to know when you've been hurt."

She moved quickly around to his other side where she could see the side of his neck. "It's only a scratch. The bullet just touched you," she reassured, groping in her jade-green bag with gold-tinted fingernails. "Hold still! I'll fix it."

He stood still. Whatever he had been about to say had vanished from his mind, but it was a pleasure to stand and have Nadine fussing over him and ministering to him with obvious concern. She was indisputably lovely, and dressed in a way that was designed to bring out the fact. He was conscious of envious glances. Streams of brightly dressed, handsome people returning to work from lunch passed by, their feet soundless on the green resilient sidewalk. Some of them were talking quietly and laughing in conversation as they passed; some were listening to music spools with ear-buttons that touched his hearing with a faint faraway strain of music as they passed. He was pleased that they looked at her, and had no attention for him.

Standing still under Nadine's ministrations, he said appreciatively, "You're the perfect partner to take along to an accident."

She smiled up at him. "Well, if you're going to make a habit of being shot at, I'll buy more band-aids." Stepping back she cocked her head to inspect her work. The wail of a police patrol wing throttled down to a growl as it touched road and swung in to where the crowd clustered. She glanced back doubtfully. "Should we go back and tell them?"

He touched the small flesh-colored bandage on his scratch, looking at the reflection in a window. "Hardly worth going back. All we'd prove is that someone was shooting, and they know that already."

THEY walked on together through the shade of the tall trees that lined the avenue. "When your Revision Committee for the Patent Code testifies before Congress," he said, remembering what he had been saying, "you should be spokesman in that tight green and gold suit you're wearing. They'd agree to anything."

She picked up the thread. "'Gentlemen,' I'll say—"

"Undulating slightly," he added.

"Invention has become a form of restriction. The law has been diverted from—"

"*Seduced* from!"

"Seduced from its original intention, which was to guarantee sufficient profits to the inventor to encourage and stimulate invention. Instead, research now has as its main purpose the desire to invent something first and patent it first, not for use, but to prevent its use, to preserve the status quo for the industry, financing the research, by pre-

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venting its use by competitors."

A small tube elevator whooshed them up to the sixtieth floor, "Lawyers' Row." They were at the door of his office.

PAUL BREDEN
PATENT LAW

Nadine's office was further down the corridor. Paul pushed his door open, hoping to extend their lunchtime together a little more, beguiling her with the imaginary speech. "At this point your claque in the gallery claps and cheers and stomps, and while they are being ejected you pull out your compact and put on more lipstick."

They walked into the inner office past the secretary, ignoring the fact that lunch was over and they both had work to do. Nadine continued the speech, gesticulating with mock earnestness. He considered her from a standpoint of an imaginary audience of lascivious Congressmen. She was beautiful—yes, but too perfectly dressed, too crisp and finished and unapproachable. It was probably an effect carefully calculated to keep the minds of her business associates on the subject of business.

"You should muss your hair a little," he interrupted, getting a frown for his efforts.

"The competition, not to be outdone, pours its money into research to find *other* ways of doing what it needs done rather than the way the patent excludes them from. This, gentlemen, is. . . ."

He looked at her with a familiar question coming up in his mind, quickening his pulse. She probably had a private life of friends and lovers, but he had never dared let himself approach that side of her, although they had known each other for six months. She could choose among many men—men without his handicap—yet she seemed glad to be with him as a law collaborator, and welcomed any free time they could escape from business lunches to eat together. Yet. . . .

The Penalty of Uniqueness

WHAT would you do if you suddenly discovered you were not human at all, but an alien? Would it change your feelings towards your friends—your wife—your sweetheart—your parents? Would you still feel drawn toward humans, or would a new craving spring up in you to find and join your own kind?

Independent as many men may be in their thinking, there is yet the basic herd comfort of being not too much unlike their fellows. Nothing is lonelier than uniqueness—except being an outcast. This was the ferment which worked in Paul Breden, from the day he discovered he was different. And in him worked not only the loneliness, but an outraged sense of injustice dangerously like revenge.

—*The Editor*

". . . does not make the inventor any richer, for he draws only his research salary from his company. Actually, the prime result is duplication of research, so that instead of each day bringing hundreds of brilliant new inventions, the patent office is flooded daily with hundreds of brilliant new ways of doing the same damned thing, each one tying up the patent office with its red tape—each one no better than the other!"

He sat down behind his desk and propped his elbows on it, smiling. "Add this. 'There are nine and ninety ways —Of constructing tribal lays, And every —Single—One—Of them—Is *right!*' "

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"As Kipling wrote—" she began, then stopped to frown at him. "Would Congressmen know that lays are a form of poetry?"

He laughed. "All the better if they don't." It was not often they had lunch together or extended their lunch hours like this. They were too busy. She probably would have been surprised to learn how much these occasional lunches meant to him.

The televiewer chimed.

PAUL muttered a "damn," reaching for the right phone, and Nadine gave him a farewell salute and moved toward the door. "Wait a minute," he asked her, "and we'll see who this jerk is." He pushed a button and a screen on the wall opposite him sprang to life in color, showing a lean old man in a snappy pearl gray suit, waiting with restless impatience. "Yardly Devon." Breden identified him without pleasure, remembering the things Devon had said before switching off the last time they had seen each other.

"His last two inventions were not patentable, Nadine, and I told him so, but he insisted I try to get patents on them anyhow. When they were rejected he claimed I'd sabotaged them. He probably took them to another consultant, got the same opinion, and wants to apologize now." He indicated the chair beside the desk. "Sit there a minute. You're out of range of the scanner."

She smiled and sat down. The bell chimed again impatiently, and Breden switched on the scanner that put him on Devon's screen. "Yes?"

A light came into the eyes of the dapper old man as he saw Breden. With a quick move he jumped to his feet, bringing a gun up from somewhere below screen range. "I've got you now, Breden. I suspected it a long time, and now I know what you are."

For a half second of time Breden started to laugh, then he remembered the shot on the street a quarter hour before with a sudden cold jolt. Devon was not kidding.

"Careful there, old boy, you'll break your scanner," Nadine called.

His screen couldn't see her, and the tailored neat old man was childishly startled. "Who said that!" He leaned forward, peering, then turned to inspect the partially visible room showing on the screen, the gun waving in his hand. "I've got to kill him," he said clearly to no one in particular. "He's a diploid." He dwindled and came into full view further away, peered around and then wandered out of screen view.

"Crazy," Breden muttered. He felt weak. That last meaningless word had been a shock. "Have the police trace the call. I'll try to hold him." He handed her one of the phones.

The old man had wandered back to his screen and he glimpsed the motion. He whirled, gun leveled. "Don't try to escape!"

Breden pulled his hand back and arranged his features in an expression of respect and interest. He felt shaken. *Diploid.* Judging by Devon's voice it meant something different from a human. It had been a long time since he had heard that inflection in anyone's tone. The meaningless word rang in his ears as if he had been called something animal. He forced himself to think. What would hold an inventor's interest long enough for the police to reach him? "I gather that that gun shoots through television screens. Could you give me an idea how it works, Mister Devon?"

Nadine was murmuring into the phone, "Yes, with a gun. It looks like a private room he's calling from." She turned and whispered, "What's your number?"

"Lascar B-1063," Breden said, without turning his head. On the screen Devon was looking down at his automatic.

"It's an invention—" he said, looking up at the sound of Breden's voice—"a new Devon invention." The old man stroked it fondly with his left hand without turning it from its perfect pictured aim at Breden's face. It looked startlingly deadly in full stereo pointing at

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him from the screen.

Breden pulled his eyes from it, resisting an irrational impulse to switch off the screen. "How does it work?"

If only he could keep this conversation going for a while the police would come on to the screen in the room behind Devon and take him away.

The inventor's voice began to rise. "I won't tell you. It's secret. And you're not going to stop me from patenting it like you did the others. You sneaking diploids are trying to get in everywhere. But I won't let you have the Earth. You can't fool me! I know what you are. You're not going to hold up progress by keeping people from getting patents—" His voice had risen to a shriek; his face was distorted, *"I'll stop you! I'll kill you. . . . I'll kill you right now!"* The shots came with a shocking crack of sound. The screen was too clear, too tridimensional, too much like an undefended open window through which a yammering madman poured shots at him. Instinctively Breden threw himself to one side and half rose before he could check the motion.

The vision of the shouting old man cracked across like a broken mirror and, still moving, began to waver in ripples like something seen in disturbed water, then abruptly shattered to darkness. They heard a shriek, "Got you!" just before a final tearing sputter and the dull *pfut* of a blown fuse as Devon's sound system went dead.

NADINE had been staring fascinated, but now there was nothing to stare at but the smooth grayness of the viewer screen. "He just shot his televiewer all to hell," she said into the phone, still staring fascinated at the screen. "It blew out . . . that's right. We'll leave it on." She put the phone back in its cradle with a sigh. "They said not to switch off."

Her expression changed as she looked at him. "What is it, Mart? What's wrong?"

"Nothing." Another spasm of depression hit him. "Oh hell yes—everything. You heard him call me a diploid?"

She took out a cigarette case and opened it, selecting a cigarette with unnecessary care. She was concerned. "One of those little green men, you mean? Smoke?"

"No thanks."

She untelescoped a long cigarette holder and fitted the cigarette into it, speaking thoughtfully, "I heard him. It was nothing personal, Mart. For a paranoid there always has to be the deros or the spies or the Martians, and the big conspiracy somehow against him. It had to be someone, and you were elected. You must see enough nuts coming in here with lunatic inventions and delusions of grandeur to be used to it."

He leaned forward and lit her cigarette. "Too used to it. Beginning to wonder." He put away his cigarette lighter and held up his hand, looking at it. Five fingers and a thumb. Too many fingers.

"Right up to high school they called me "Marty" for "Martian Breden"—and it wasn't a friendly nickname. I was with a gang, but I was its goat. If we played cops and robbers—I was the robber, and got arrested or electrocuted or shot resisting arrest. If we played cowboys and Indians—I tried to burn people at the stake and got my throat slit by a hero with a bowie knife, and bit the dust. In high school they started getting smarter, and I had friends who *were* friends, but for them I was "Marty" too. By that time it was my name. I like it now, but that's where it came from."

He put his six-fingered hand down on the desk. "When a new client comes in, now, I mention that the simplest inventions are the best, like the safety pin—or the small labor saving device I invented which makes it easier to play the piano and carry four beer bottles in each hand. 'What is it?' they ask . . . I hold my hand up. 'Extra finger' I say. 'It is patented.' That always tickles them."

He had given her the same line when they first met. He remembered that he had felt the same first hostile alertness

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and expectation of hurt for her as for any other stranger, and had concealed his tension behind the usual line of entertaining talk. She had been just another beautiful woman to him, a lawyer like himself, but more poised and bland than he was—and too b e a u t i f u l l y dressed, too efficient, probably critical and unforgiving and egotistical, someone who could hurt you if you dropped your guard.

That was before he knew her. His guard was all the way down now. There was no pretending and no caution when he talked with Nadine. "I'm not just being sensitive, Nade, I need jokes like that. I have to use them, and use them carefully. So they'll get a lift and a laugh every time they notice a detail that's different. That Mart! Always a character. Everything with him has to be original—if I don't point it out and make jokes about it, sooner or later people begin to fidget and grow uncomfortable with an instinct of something being wrong. There are two many subtle physical oddities that disturb instinct with a feeling of misproportion. The only thing I can do to stop nervousness and tension from building up in them is to bring out my differences and display them like a collection of card tricks, so whenever they get that wrong feeling again, it's part of the joke, just Mart being a character again."

II

FOR a time Nadine sat back, something close to pity on her lovely face. Then she grinned and mimicked him from memory, with a proudly bent arm and clenched fist, demonstrating the muscles. "My own invention. . . ." she quoted words he had said, flexing her arm as she had seen him do, with a precise back and forth motion. "I'm the only *genuinely* self made man. Self made —self assembled—" a rusty hinge noise began in perfect time with the motion of the flexing arm, and she glanced at the arm with dismay and tried to stop it. It kept moving stiffly, the rusty squeak growing louder. Hastily she grabbed it and brought it to a halt with her other hand, and then apologetically took an imaginary small object from her pocket. "Of course, I was pretty young at the time . . . might have slipped and gotten some parts in from the wrong stack . . . not enough light. . . ." Nadine's voice faded to an apologetic mumble as she carefully oiled her elbow with an imaginary oil can.

He was laughing. This was the first time he had seen anyone else do his act. He had seen clients laugh, but this was the first time he had seen what they were laughing at from the outside, and, well, it *was* funny.

She looked up from oiling her elbow, her eyes round and solemn. "You were saying?" she asked innocently, putting the invisible and imaginary oil can carefully back into her pocket, and then smiled. "I wondered about that end-man effect, Mart. It's amusing and starts a talk off in a good mood, but it isn't exactly like you, not when a person gets to know you better. Are you sure you need it?"

For an instant a crowd of painful incidents pushed against the unlocked door of memory. The time, when he was twelve, visiting the city and he had wandered into a strange neighborhood where the kids did not know him; the fight he had lost. And other times. "I've lived long enough to find out what happens if I don't."

"Are you sure that still applies?" she asked, her cool green eyes showing interest and concern.

Breden went on talking as if he hadn't heard her question. His eyes held a faraway look as he remembered people's past reactions to his difference.

"Take my face—ears set higher than normal and tipped back more—a difference easy to sense, hard to focus on. It makes my face look foreign, but what race? I can see the reaction to it even in the faces of people who pass on the sidewalk—the usual quick unseeing glance,

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For a moment he could feel the hypodermics plunging in deep with germs and poisons

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then a double-take and a puzzled expression. Then they're past and they forget about it. It doesn't lead anywhere with adults. No one spits at me anymore or stops me to ask who the hell I am and why don't I go back to wherever I came from, but the reaction is always the same. None of them can classify me. It must be a genuinely strong feeling of something alien." He laughed suddenly and harshly, surprising himself with the sound. "By the law of democracy the majority is right. Maybe I *am* a Martian, if that's what they think!"

She blew a plume of smoke reflectively, not commenting, then picked up the phone. "Let's see if the police have our paranoid friend yet."

"A Martian." Saying that hateful word to Nadine made it sound like a joke and not like something that had been dreams and nightmares ever since he was a kid and they had dubbed him "Martian" Breden; and he'd known something secret about himself that the others did not know.

Nadine's voice, vibrant and soft. "Calling in for Paul Breden about a threat to him we reported . . . yes, did you? Oh . . . no . . . of course. Thank you." She hung up thoughtfully, "You can switch off now."

He switched off the scanner that had held connection with Devon's blown televiewer. "What'd they say?"

"They didn't get him. When they got there there was nothing but a smashed televiewer and the neighbor in the next room complaining about the racket—that must have been his gun."

"Anything else?"

"They want you to drop down to the local station house today or tomorrow and swear out a complaint. I said yes."

"Check."

She smiled. "Let's hope he sticks to trying to kill you by television."

Then when he thought she had let it pass, Nadine looked at her long, gold-tinted nails, and asked, "What did you mean about being a Martian?"

She had known it was more than a gag.

He glanced at his appointment pad. "Could you spare me fifteen more minutes?"

She settled back and crossed her legs. "I'm listening."

He hesitated a moment, his hands flat on the desk top, looking for easier ways of saying what he was going to say. Stray fugitive thoughts scurried around the fringes of consciousness like a dusty frightened nest of mice looking for knot-holes of escape from a suddenly opened closet—mice that could have grown to full scale monsters if he had waited longer before telling someone of this. And the tightening feeling in his chest warned of coming fear, the ghost that always comes out of mental closets that have been locked too long and are opened reluctantly.

IT WOULD be better, he decided, to speak rapidly and bluntly, or he might not get it out at all. There was no real trouble, it was just that this was the first time he had explained to anyone. What are you afraid of? This just needs airing out.

"Let's take it item by item," he said slowly, still holding his hands palm down, flat against the desk top, feeling their slight tremor. "I've got six fingers, right?"

"Sure," she said with a touch of defiance. "Six good fingers."

"Ever notice something odd about my walk?"

"Yes." She smiled reflectively. "Individual . . . a slightly crouched springy look. I'd recognize you by it."

"My feet are different."

"Oh?" She exhaled a translucent puff of smoke, looking at it, then met his eye. "In what way?"

He swung in his chair so that she could see his legs and shoes. "They're long in the arch, and abnormally narrow. I can't keep my heel on the ground, it doesn't feel right there. Go on my toes instead." He considered his deep rubber soles, checking their normal appearance. "My shoes are built up inside—up in the

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back—down in the front, so inside I'm standing on my toes the way I like it. The angle brings my shoe down to normal length." He looked up at her, challenging her to answer. "Remind you of something?"

"Hocks," she said reluctantly. "Do they hurt?" It was a key question.

"No." He knew what she meant. An abnormality should be imperfect. Feet hurt vehemently at the slightest trace of imperfection. His feet felt fine.

"What else?" she asked grimly. He could see the conclusions forming in her mind.

"What race would you say I am, Nadine?"

The long grey-green eyes wandered over his face. "I don't know. A nice, handsome blend—definitely worth staring at. If you're sensitive about stares—try being ugly and peculiar both. People will look away in droves. . . . Probably some Japanese for those good, broad cheekbones and the set of those ears. Mongoloid skull, Caucasian nose, extra wide chiseled mouth, Hindu almost. I'd guess American Indian, or high cast Brahmin. That orangy olive skin doesn't tell me anything." She smiled. "I give up."

"My parents were straight Caucasian—white midwestern Americans from Omaha."

"Anyone in the family look like you?"

"No."

"What else?" She was forgetting to smoke.

He bent his right arm, clenching his fist near his shoulder. "My arms. The proportion of forearm to upper arm is wrong. They should be about equal. My fist should come level with my shoulder." His fist was five inches above his shoulder. "My upper arm is shorter and thicker than my forearm."

"Handicap?" The question was automatic now. She knew what the answer would be.

"Advantage, I think. My arms are unusually strong." Abnormalities should be crippling defects, but these weren't. People had told him that he was one of the strongest and most vital persons they had ever met. He wondered how much of this Nadine had noticed herself, and how much she had shrugged off. She wasn't shrugging now.

"What else?"

He hesitated. There was something else—a fact that came into his mind reluctantly as if it were something that was half untrue, a private fairy tale that had no meaning except for him. He had hidden it too long. It was a repression now. His fingers whitened against the desk top. He could feel them trembling. "I've got a soft spot in the back of my head." That's what he had told the other kids when they had bumped it accidentally and he had cried. His hair covered it, and he hadn't let them look at it. He had fought instead.

"On the left side," he said. "The doctor said it looks like it was starting out to be an eye." He watched her face and saw it go hard and expressionless in defense against whatever was coming, reflecting his own sudden tight control. He continued levelly without change of tone. "I'm lying to you, Nadine. It *is* an eye!"

AFTER he had told her, he sat frozen. This brought the fact to full reality in one blow. *An eye in the back of his head. What was it doing there?*

After a pause she said. "I believe you." Her cigarette had burned down to the holder. She stubbed it out.

"Want to see it?" They had to bull through this now it was begun.

"No—yes." She got up and moved behind him. "Show me."

He reached back and parted his hair in the place where he let it grow long.

There was a moment of silence. "Does it open?" she asked behind him.

He opened it. The unaccustomed glare of the light in the room was painful, a blinding blend of tans and blues. A pinkish blur came into focus in the shape of a face. He shut his eye again, gratefully shutting out the light.

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Nadine walked back in front of the desk looking younger and more flustered than he had ever seen her. "Not the right place for an eye," she muttered confusedly. Fumblingly she took out a cigarette, juggled and dropped it. "It blinked at me," she said, picking up the cigarette and trying with trembling fingers to fit it into her holder.

Her confusion was amusing. He had never seen her even slightly flustered before, and the sight distracted him from his own reactions. The tremor left his hands as he began to smile. Self consciously, Nadine made an effort to say something controlled and p r a c t i c a l. "Why don't you have it taken out?"

He looked at her without answering for a moment, then said, "Why don't you have one of your eyes taken out?"

She looked up at him, seeing him as a person, thinking how he would feel, and suddenly had back her balance and wisdom like picking up a purse she had dropped. "Sorry. You gave me the right answer to that one."

He grinned, snapping on his cigarette lighter and holding it out for her, his hand steady, and she remembered the cigarette in her hand with a start and looked from it to him, beginning to grin back, and leaned forward putting it between her lips. When the cigarette caught she straightened. "All right, so I'm a sissy."

They shared smiles. "Okay, I've shown you the inventory. How does it add up?"

She sobered abruptly and took the holder from her lips and looked at the cigarette's glowing tip, delaying speech. Then she took a deep breath and forced herself to look at him and reply. "All right. What gives you the idea that you're human?"

For a moment he didn't breathe or think, then his mind raced like a squirrel trapped in a cage. It was almost unbelievable how long he had managed to avoid the elementary question that had trapped him at last. Why should he think he was human? Why should any *man* have so many freakish differences, and yet feel no pain from any of them at all?

Automatically he gasped out the stock answer he had used to fool himself with all those years. "My parents are normal."

"How do you know that they are your parents?"

Here was another shattering question. They were obviously *too* normal, no physical peculiarities at all. They could not possibly be his parents, and yet he had wanted them to be his parents when he was a kid, wanted it desperately enough to fool himself into believing it. The shock of the idea when he heard it now was appalling. It was the effect of the tremendous effort by which he had always avoided that awful question. It was incredible how long he had managed to suppress it, and how cleverly he had been able to fool himself, he thought dully.

All right, so he wasn't human.

Then damn all humans! The hatred flamed like a blow torch. He could hate them now, all these puny, two-eyed five-fingered people who were the same race as the kids who had jeered and tormented him through his bitter childhood. Somewhere there were people like him—people for whom three eyes and six fingers were *right*, who could be friends and accept him without thinking anything about him was wrong—or ugly—or *inhuman*.

"All right," he said thickly. "So I'm a Martian. Now what?"

Nadine held up a perfectly manicured five-fingered hand. "Not so fast!" She was recovering from the shock and thinking now as he'd seen her concentrate when they were working on a tough case and the opposition had them in a tight corner. She was on his side, battling against his conclusions. "You don't have to go all the way into a padded cell with our friend there." She jerked her head at the televiewer screen. "We don't need extra-terrestrials to account for a non-human anthropoid type race. You're obviously Earth adapted,

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so you have to be a member of a race natural to Earth."

FOR a moment Breden was held by the sight of her hand. It had five fingers, five lovely fingers, and he couldn't hate Nadine. He couldn't hate his "father" or his "mother" either, and they were human. Even some of his clients were good guys and honest dealers. He clenched his hands and unclenched them in frustration. Was there nothing in the world that was simple? Nothing that a person could be wholeheartedly either for or against? He smiled wryly. A tolerant sense of humor was supposed to be the mature reaction to such impulses. But it was a pale substitute for the pleasure of a knock-down, drag-out fight.

He forced his attention back to what Nadine was saying. Other races on Earth . . . "There isn't any other—"

She interrupted, restraining a knife-edge of impatient logic. "No other known species of mankind *surviving*. But paleontologists have already dug up almost a hundred extinct species. Apparently the conditions were so favorable back in the early days that every species of tarsier, monkey, lemur, baboon and gorilla existing started evolving an offshoot branch of man, and homo sap got there firstus with the mostus and wiped the others out. But perhaps he hasn't wiped *all* the others out. There may be a few small tribes of a different kind still surviving in the hills and jungles."

He had wanted to meet and know people like himself, but this presented only a depressing vision of a patent lawyer foolishly out of place on some distant mountainside, trying to communicate in six-fingered sign language to a bunch of frightened six-fingered savages.

"If there are any people like myself around," he said emphatically, "they'll be running things."

"Like that, eh?" she looked him up and down, measuring him for a straightjacket. "The diploid conspiracy?"

"Like that," he snapped, uneasily defiant.

She stood up and touched her fingers to the top of his desk, looking at him with irritated affection. "Let's bring it down to common sense, Mart. If there's any group running things, it's obviously a group of low grade imbeciles. The world has never been in such a mess. We've been walking the plank towards an atomic blow-up for fifty years, and the longer we take to get there, the bigger the blow. Or put it this way . . . granted your I.Q. is high, and maybe high I.Q. goes with six fingers—are *you* running things? There are a million people every bit as intelligent as ourselves. We meet them every day in this line of work. Are they controlling the world?" Her vehemence grew, adding force to her words and brightness to her eyes. "Now add them up. If all the political experts, intellectuals, economists, sociologists and general geniuses who ought to know how to run things better, plus all their brains, success, money and power can't get control of what's going on—then a hypothetical handful of conspiring three-eyes has about as much chance of seizing power as a package of Jello has of stiffening up the English Channel for dessert!"

He grinned and cowered down behind his desk. "Cease fire! You're right, *kamerad*."

She smiled, holding out her hand. "All right, Mart. The war's over. Now I have to get back to work."

He took her hand, standing up. "Sorry you can't stay."

"I'm sorry too. We had a nice lunch." She looked at him slantwise from under her long dark lashes, suddenly provocatively helpless and appealing. "Remember, any time you want someone to talk to while you're being used for a target, or any time you feel confessional and want to tell someone about a few extra things like a third arm, or how you walk through walls . . . ."

"I'll call on you." He finished the sentence as she let it trail off wistfully, and he hustled her toward the door, grinning. She had taken it the way he

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had hoped she would, as something casual. There was no discernible difference in the easy relationship they had established.

She poked her lovely head back in a moment after he had closed the door after her. "If you find out that there really is a Martian conspiracy, tell me so I can help. I like conspiracies."

Suddenly fear and loneliness came again. *"I like conspiracies,"* she had said. His spirits sank. But what of Martians, of freaks. How could she like a freak? Perhaps it was all pretense. The old wave of doubts assailed him. A spasm clenched somewhere in his chest and he rose trying to think of something to say—some question that would somehow bring an answer he could trust.

Nadine stood in the doorway in her green suit, looking at him, seeing something in his expression. She came back into the office and put her hand on his arm, looking up into his face with an intent and puzzled gaze. Something changed in the air between them. He felt the warmth of her hand on his arm as if it were fusing into his body, as if in some subtle way their bloodstreams had grown into one. For a long joined moment they stood in silence, their gazes locked together, and then she said in an oddly quiet voice, "Well, there's work."

With an effort they stepped away from each other. "I'll see you, Nade," he said as she walked away.

"Yes," she said, for he had stated something that had to happen. They could not help but see each other. The thought of remaining apart had become an impossible, ridiculous thought.

He had been given his answer, and it was magnificently more than he had hoped for.

He postponed thinking on the subject, letting it remain in the back of his mind as a source of warmth and happiness, and got down to his delayed stack of work. An interview with a client was due in five minutes and he had to brief up on the legal twists he was planning to use to get the man's patent through. Concentration shut out from his universe everything but patents and technical details for the time that was necessary. But before the man came in, Mart lifted his head and let his mind range back over the discussion, just once. Maybe there was some explanation for his differences, some pleasant explanation that he could tell Nadine with pride. *Mart Breden wants to know where he came from, what his real name is, and why he has an extra finger on each hand and an extra eye in the back of his head.*

Put that way, it hardly seemed too much to ask.

III

ON THE way over to the police station at four thirty he heard a shot. It came from God knows where, and it missed, but there was no telling how close it had come. He didn't stop to investigate; he merely hurried his stride down into the nearest belt entrance and merged himself into the crowd. No one turned to see what the sound was. There was enough noise in the quiet city in the first home-going rush to partially muffle it and make it seem like a normal street sound, and there was no reason for anyone else to think of a possibility of shots. Violence was too unusual to be expected.

Stepping on a belt the crowd dispersed over the local and express strips, and for a moment Mart was exposed again before the belt carried him out of shot range of the platform. There was no shot, but he was sweating as he found a chair and sat down. It would be easy to be killed that way. The unwary passers-by of the city could not defend him; they simply provided an innocent camouflage and ambush from which Devon could take easy aim without being noticed.

The rest of the way over he was wary and alert, but there were no more shots.

At the station the police informed him that they had not managed to locate Devon in his usual haunts, but they had alerted hotels and airlines to watch for him.

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"If you set someone to follow me," Mart said, "You'll probably follow Devon too. He's probably waiting for me somewhere along my usual route home. He tried to get me again today." He began to have the futile feeling that the police were not particularly interested. The reply confirmed that feeling.

"We don't do much bodyguarding anymore Mr. Dev—Mr. ah—Breden. We're pretty busy, and there aren't as many cops as there used to be. Automatic alarms take care of protection against burglary and housebreaking. Hypnoquestioning has made it pretty difficult for professional crooks, because they find themselves on the suspects' line-up every time there's a crime in the city, and if they did it, they find themselves saying so. There's no profit in the business, and there aren't so many crooks as there used to be. We have things to do, but most cops are college trained specialists. We route the traffic of the city on all levels, on different loads and flow directions at different times of day; we calculate the maximum load limit of each route and how to reroute from it if it breaks down. We keep things moving and keep jams from piling up. We keep people from getting hurt around fires and power failures and broken water mains, things like that. The city is a big machine and we have to know where all the controls and keypoints are, and keep the wheels turning. You see—" he spread his hands—"we just don't have any dumb lug with nothing better to do than guard one single man."

It sounded like a speech he had made often to plaintive citizens. "You see our position?"

Doggedly Mart asked, "But you have some department to investigate shootings, don't you?"

"Of course. We have Homicide and Crimes of Violence sections—mostly plainclothes investigation." The officer smiled. "No matter how unprofitable it is, people still get mad enough to try to kill each other."

"How do I attract its attention?" Mart asked, "By getting myself killed?"

The officer was amused and patronizing. "Don't worry. If he's as far gone as he sounds from your story we'll probably pick him up tomorrow for taking off his clothes and sitting in the middle of Times Square blowing bubbles. He won't be around long enough to bother you."

Breden remembered Devon's trim appearance, and his pride when apparently he had been sane. He had probably been close to paranoia for a long time, and vanity and surface self-esteem held him back from any conspicuous oddity. Probably he'd be witty and poised to the end, and go to the mental hospital with his sandals shined, his stickpin fastening his tossed-back rain-cape dashingly at the shoulder, his Phi Beta Kappa key impeccably in place and his wristwatch wound, the picture of a sane man being led away by lunatics.

EXCEPT for a small obstacle like trying to kill long range by television, Devon was his choice for the murderer-most-likely-to-succeed. If the police wouldn't protect him, he would have to protect himself.

"I guess I'll buy a gun." He said it with malicious pleasure, knowing it was legal, but almost unheard of, for a man to carry a weapon for self-defense. Let them have their attention attracted by a gun battle in the streets, if nothing else would do it.

The fattish man blinked, his smile fading slightly. "This is a crowded town mister. You can't go shooting guns off in a city, because you'd be mowing down the bystanders six to a slug. I can't stop you, but if you're licensed, how about borrowing something from us to shoot at him, something not so dangerous?"

Mart was suddenly interested, remembering the spectacular police weapons in the hands of the screen heroes. He'd been watching them enviously for years. "How about a fizz pistol? I've always wondered if they really work like they do on teevee shows—"

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"No! Those aren't for civilians. You'd gas crowds at every shot. You know the penalty for unauthorized use of hypno-drugs—sixty-years-to-life, or even death. If I loaned a hypno-loaded pistol out to a civilian we'd both be behind bars before you were out the door. We can't use them ourselves for questioning without being under bond and having three witnesses and a tape recording of every word." He seemed genuinely upset. Apparently someone in the department had been rated down for misuse of hypno recently, for he paused and wiped his forehead with a paper handkerchief, and then tried a feeble smile. "No, all I've got for unauthorized types like yourself is a curare automatic. It won't hurt anybody if you handle it carefully. Just aim low; try not to shoot anyone in the eye, huh?"

Mart walked out feeling better able to defend himself. In one pocket was a button push that would put a directional call for help on the radios of patrol wings, and in the other a small flat automatic that threw a hollow bullet filled with a harmless drug of the curare type that made its victim instantaneously limp and unable to move. Two shots would cause unconsciousness, and three, death. He had been warned to shoot for the legs where a puncture would cause little damage, and to stop when one bullet had penetrated.

Back on the subsurface belt conveyers he kept alert for the sight of a slim old man in an iridescent pearl grey suit. He would have to see Devon first or no weapon would help him . . .

In his apartment he called his parents, or the people whom he had always loved and thought of as his parents. They were retired on one of the Florida Keys. He asked, as tactfully as he could, about his birth.

"I'm sorry you found out about that, Marty," said his father over the televiewer. He stood on the screen, tanned and healthy with wrinkles weathered deep into his face. A flaming orange shirt with fluorescent green seagulls flying across his chest put a strain on the screen's color system, and the seagulls wavered from bluer to yellower green as the scanner struggled to approximate its shade. Through a window behind him was visible a view of deep blue sky and white sand. "We thought it might hurt your feelings, if you found out. But I guess you're old enough to know that it doesn't matter."

"Could you tell me who were my real parents?"

"I don't know, Marty—it never seemed important to us. The only one who knew was my brother Ralph—he helped arrange the adoption—but he wouldn't say, except to say that they were good people. He'd promised not to tell I guess. He was a doctor, and doctors have to keep their secrets."

"No reflection on you, Dad, but I'm curious. I'd like to find out. Could you tell me how to get in touch with Uncle Ralph?"

"Why, he died about two years ago. We mentioned it to you in a letter, but I guess you forgot."

They talked pleasantly about other things for a while, and then he switched off thoughtfully, his problem coming up in his mind. Doctor Ralph Breden had known who his parents were, but he had been dead for two years.

IF THERE was an unknown species of man, what was it doing in Omaha? And if these men traveled among ordinary men, how did they manage to keep their existence a secret? The ability to keep the secret required money, intelligence and organization. And why did they want to stay secret? His imagination drifted toward the idea of a conspiracy again, and he smiled and rejected it. All these tenuous deductions were based on the idea that he was of an alien species, and that was merely an unproven hypothesis. There probably could be some other explanation of his physical peculiarities.

His thoughts were broken by a sound like someone turning the knob of his

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apartment door. It was locked of course, and it would be no use to anyone to turn it. He finished his shower and dressed hurriedly, scanning the corridor through the door viewplate before stepping out. No intruder was lurking there, and he began to wonder if the sound had been imagination. When he got to the street a feeling of being watched suddenly came with complete conviction. Casually he put his back against the nearest wall and inspected the street, checking each person.

Many people walked by. Some noticed him and glanced at him with the usual disconcerted reaction deepening to suspicion as they noticed his searching eyes, and the tension of his hands in his pockets.

He noticed the change in their expression and wondered bitterly how little provocation it would take to have them decide he had done something and call the police. Sourly he gave up looking and walked on his way, taking his chances on a bullet. The feeling of being watched continued.

In the airbus waiting room he had a chance to look around without attracting attention to himself and being stared at. People always looked around in waiting rooms, searching for first sight of whoever they were waiting for. His careful inspection of the room went unnoticed. There was no one in evidence who looked like Devon. Apparently Devon was not following him after all.

Mart picked up a newspaper from a mechanical vender. The headlines were much the same as yesterday's. As he flipped toward the back pages an ad in a lower corner caught his eye. It was a picture of a hand, held out flat, the fingers separated, and it reminded him of his problem. The ad was nondescript, easy to pass without seeing. It could have been selling anything—astrology—palm reading—insurance. "Worried?" the caption read. "Dissatisfied? Seeing . . . ."

People began to stream down from the upper level exits. The airbus had come in. *Worried?* Smiling wryly he folded the newspaper, dropped it into a trash dispenser and watched the draft suck it away into darkness. *Dissatisfied?* Smiling more broadly he went slowly home.

The feeling of being watched was with him again, but he hadn't seen anyone who looked like Devon, and he was beginning to get used to the feeling.

WHEN he stepped into his office the next day the viewer was chiming. He switched it on while taking off his overshirt, and Nadine appeared on the screen. "Hey, the Martians are advertising for you."

"What do you mean?" He took the curare gun and the alarm button the police had given him from his pockets and carefully placed them in a desk drawer.

When he glanced back at the screen she was holding up a magazine with a full page ad showing a well drawn hand, almost two thirds life size. "Did you see this ad?" It looked like an enlarged replica of the one he had glanced at in the newspaper the day before.

"I noticed it," he admitted. "Didn't read it."

"Notice the hand?"

"Yeah, what's it about? Palm reading?"

"Count the fingers."

The hand was well drawn and looked normal, but this time he didn't have to count. He could see the difference. Six fingers.

This was it. The thing he had been looking for. He wondered how often the ad had run. How many years had he been passing it by? He tried to control the eagerness in his voice. "What does it say? Read it!"

She read clearly. "Restless? Dissatisfied? Seeing dots before your eyes—too many fingers on your hands? Call Wesley C-06320. *We might be what you're looking for.*" She glanced up eagerly. "And at the bottom here it says, "National Counseling Service 1862-A Halshire Avenue. That's right in the city!"

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"We can check on it this lunch. Have the time free?"

"I can fit it in. I don't want to miss any of this."

They found that the address on Halshire Avenue was a huge, beautiful white building with a three-story-high webbed-bronze archway opening on exclusive Halshire Place. Recessed inconspicuously into the white stone wall a long way from the main door was a private entrance. It was padded in morocco leather, studded with bronze studs and labeled inconspicuously with a small bronze plate. *National Counseling Service.* Through a porthole window inset in the door they could see a waiting room which was luxurious with the expensive Spartan simplicity of modernistic furniture.

Nadine touched his arm. "Going in?" People passed them in the sunlight, going both ways in orderly separate streams on the wide green sidewalk. Some glanced at them with faint interest. Some glanced back at him after they had passed, with that expression of puzzlement that he always noticed.

He glanced at his watch. It had taken them fifteen minutes to reach the address, and they both had appointments at one. "No. We have to save a little time for lunch."

A well dressed man came out, flagged a taxi, and drove away without giving them a glance.

"Martian going to lunch," murmured Nadine.

THEY ate in a nearby drugstore, sitting at a counter looking at the impassive white stone face of the towering building across the street. The separate entrance was a luxury for which the building must have charged high rent. Apparently the National Counseling Service could afford such expensive whimseys. They ate hastily in silence, considering the implications of what they had seen. The National Counseling Service had money and power, and they were interested in him for some reason. That advertisement was obviously directed at him and others like him. He wondered how many others there were to see the ad.

"Power . . ." he mused. "A big organization too. . . ."

Nadine set a sliding pointer on the menu and pushed a button at its base. "We don't know how much space they've taken behind that swank front. Maybe it's just intended to look expensive to frighten off people who are attracted by the ad and genuinely come for counseling." She sipped a malted milk that came out of the automatic mixer and continued thoughtfully. "If I were using a front like that, I think I'd give a little genuine counseling to make it stand up."

She had brought another magazine on the way over, and she began flipping through it as she talked. Pictures in fluorescent inks glowed vividly as she flipped past them. Suddenly a page turned up in cool black and grey, the familiar spread hand. "Here it is!" Nadine flattened the magazine and they looked at it together.

"Puzzled?" He read the black letters, "Discontented? We don't read palms, but we can tell you about yourself—call the National Counseling Service. We find unusual situations for unusual people."

"Now they're threatening you with an unusual situation," Nadine remarked skeptically. They had finished their lunches and it was time to go back to work. "What are you going to do, Mart?" They dropped their meal tabs in the slot and paid the amount the machine rang up. The turnstile yielded and passed them through. They stood on the sidewalk looking at the towering impassive building across the street.

"Go in and look around, I guess. I'll have to wait till after work. Would you like to come in with me?"

"No." She looked up at him soberly, the sunlight touching her face in sprinkles of light as it filtered through the elms overhead. "This looks secret, Mart. They probably wouldn't tell you any-

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thing if you had anyone with you, or even said you'd confided in anyone about this. I want to hear about it, but I'd better just spend the time looking some stuff up in the science and technology room at the library. Call me there when you find out anything, will you Mart?"

"Right." He made his face solemn and asked, "Date?"

"Date," she smiled. Hurrying together they went down the belt entrance and back toward the afternoon's work.

IV

FIVE hours later, with his hand on the bronze knob of the leather-covered door, he hesitated briefly, looking in through the small window set in the door. There was still no one inside the waiting room as far as he could see. Was the whole organization waiting for him as a trap waits for a mouse?

Then he thought of Devon, free somewhere, and looking for him with a gun. He glanced anxiously over his shoulder. There was only the stream of brightly clad people, looking wilted in the dusty late afternoon heat, going wherever people go after work. Women, girls, young men, old men—no one familiar, but there was no use standing there like a target. He turned the knob, pushed through the door and was inside. The door shut after him softly.

As it closed, the sounds of the city dwindled and vanished, and he was in a sound-proofed silence as still and remote as the room of a deserted house on some distant hillside.

It was the pine scent that had made him think of mountains, he realized after a moment. A cool drift of air brushed against his face as if somewhere near there were wide windows open to a breeze that had come through an evergreen forest.

The waiting room was comfortably darkened, with recessed lights in the small bookcase, and wide stylized chairs in polished wood and rough dark green cloth with small adjustable spotlights clamped to the left arm of each chair for easy reading.

He felt almost hidden standing in the half dark, and his tension faded. Under the glass coffee table an indirect light shone on a lower shelf, glowing on a scattering of varicolored pamphlets and bound booklets with the name *National Counseling Service* in script on the cover.

The waiting room remained soundless and peaceful. Apparently no one was going to interrupt or ask him why he was there. Through a small archway he could look down a softly lighted corridor and see the blank wall where it turned. Breden sat down and picked up a pamphlet. The back section was filled by a reassuring collection of honest-looking graphs and statistics. He turned to the front and started at the first page.

A single slogan was blazoned across it: SQUARE HOLES FOR SQUARE PEGS. A small block of print at the bottom, placed like a footnote, stated, "The National Counseling Service is approved by The American Psychometric Association, and The Association for Corrective Psychotherapy, and works in co-operation with the Human Engineering Laboratories of Stevens Institute, Columbia University and the University of Chicago. We have available on request all personal data of public, State and Federal psychometric tests already individually taken."

All the organizations mentioned were of unassailable integrity. Feeling impressed, he turned the page to the next, a glowing montage of full color tridimensional photographs of faraway landscapes, and able-looking people working with unusual machines. Large glowing white letters superimposed across the middle of the page stated aggressively: WE'LL TELL YOU WHERE TO GO—AND YOU'LL LIKE IT!

He turned to the next page. It was an exaggerated drawing of a small nervous man sitting in an electroencephalograph that was built like an electric chair, with a huge metal headpiece over his head and wires streaming from it in

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all directions:—EVEN IF IT'S TO A HOSPITAL TO HAVE YOUR HEAD EXAMINED.

THE outside door opened and a timid woman came in, looked around hesitantly and then, taking courage from his example, took a pamphlet, sat down and began to read. There was nothing visibly unusual about her. Breden began to wonder if he had merely let himself in for a total psychological check, and a diagnosis of what his abilities best fitted him to do. The six fingered hand could be merely a coincidence, a copywriter's inspiration.

He turned to the next page. On it a man stood triumphantly with his arms flexed, bulging startlingly with muscle, grinning with enthusiasm and radiating health, vigor and vitality in big orange rays: *Our technique WORKS.*

The nonsensical cheer of it was infectious. Someone came in and said, "Doctor Sheers will see you now." Breden looked up with a grin reflecting the grin in the cartoon. The receptionist had apparently spoken to him rather than to the mousy woman, so he rose. "Could I keep this pamphlet?"

"Yes indeed," she smiled professionally as a nurse smiles, warm but distant. "The office is right down the hall."

He followed, still grinning. The receptionist reminded him of Nadine in the incongruity of her pretty face and figure, and her efficient businesslike air. If nothing happened now he'd take his counseling like a man, and have a good laugh with Nadine when he came out.

They turned the blind bend in the corridor and it widened with doors on either hand for thirty feet before making another turn. The receptionist stopped before an open door to let him pass, and then closed it after him as he went in.

He found himself in a mellow, wood-paneled room with the relaxing half-dusk of indirect lighting focused on the shelves of books. Good books with thoughtful titles, and reference books he recognized as old friends, books he had for his own reference in microfilm.

The man who greeted him was spare, with a slight scholarly round-shouldered-ness. He came forward and took Breden's hand with confident hospitality. "How do you do. I'm Doctor Sheers, and you're—"

"Paul Breden."

"I'm glad to meet you, Mister Breden," he said, seating himself behind his desk. "Have a chair."

Breden sat down, trying to judge Sheers's face. The diffuse desk light lay in a pool of orange-brown on the mahogany and lit up the counselor's face from below with a ruddy light that should have made him look satanical, but instead merely made his face look round and childish. He looked at Breden, waiting for him to speak.

"I saw your advertisement," Breden said, "and I was interested. Could you tell me more about it?" He moved his hands, slightly shifting their position. The reading light that was clipped to the arm of the chair was focusing diffusely in his lap, spotlighting his hands.

The room's atmosphere of safety and concealment was the result of having one's face in shadow. It was probably very relaxing to the shy, self-conscious misfits, and the hostile types that came in, needing counseling. But the concealment was an illusion, for the counselor could read expressions and reactions in the small unconscious motions and tensions of the spotlighted hands.

He should also be able to notice a deliberate conscious motion made to call his attention, such as Breden had made. Breden waited, wondering if it would mean anything to him.

The counselor's own hands under the desk light were white and large knuckled, with blue lines of veins showing through. They lay there quietly, white and inexpressive, schooled to perfect relaxation.

"What is your profession, Mister Breden?"

"I'm an attorney—my specialty's patent law."

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"And what complaint against life attracted you here?" There was a slight smile in his voice, and he interrupted before Breden could reply. "You needn't answer that one. I'm not completely unobservant." He stood up, smiling, and said regretfully. "I would have liked to have given you a few tests and made at least a surface diagnosis. You're an interesting case, and rather well integrated considering the stress. Interesting . . . but you didn't come for that, and I can't take up your time of course."

He held out his hand.

With excitement building in him, Breden rose and shook hands. "What you want is right down the hall," the counselor said regretfully. He escorted him to the door and opened it, then reached into a recess of a bookcase shelf and pulled out a box of fig bars. "Here, have a couple of fig bars. You need to fortify your blood sugar. You're probably going to get something of a shock . . . ."

Breden accepted them with an inward smile. Some diagnosis! He was hungry all right. That sandwich for lunch hadn't been enough, and he was growing shaky, with so much excitement.

The counselor leaned out from his office and pointed. "Just turn right and keep straight ahead until it stops at a door."

"Right," Breden started off, taking a quick bite from a fig bar.

"And remember, I'd like to diagnose you sometime," the counselor said after him wistfully. "You diploids are always fascinating."

BREDEN had rounded the turn and was walking along a remarkably long featureless corridor before the full explosive impact of that struck him. "You diploids!" Then diploids were real; it was not just a gibberish word from Devon's imagination! It meant something! *Diploids.* What in the name of Howling Entropy *was* a diploid?

He wolfed the second fig bar and licked his fingers, walking steadily down a doorless corridor where every step looked just like every other step, like a corridor in a dream. What was a diploid? There was an answer to that question, but it was a joke. *He* was a diploid.

So far, being a diploid was no different from being a Martian.

Ahead, terminating the corridor, was a small door. He felt the floor-level change subtly from one stride to the next and realized that he had just walked out of one building into another. The corridor had been going straight back through the building, and it was longer than the building itself, more than half a block long. The door was closer, just ahead now.

Doctor Sheers was a pleasant man, he thought irrelevantly. Too bad there wasn't time . . . he opened the door and stepped through.

He stepped through into a shock of light. The corridor had been dimmer than he thought. Blinking, he stood still, letting his eyes adjust. To his left a woman was writing at a desk. There was an odd sweetish smell in the air. A form dimly seen moved beside him and the sweetish smell increased and mounted to his brain and swirled there with the thin singing of a dream, and he could not turn or look in the direction of the person moving beside him.

From that direction a voice asked patiently. *"Ever hear of MSKZ?"*

"I read something about it once," answered a voice that sounded like his own.

"Are you a super, or directed by supers?"

"I don't know."

"Never heard of supers, all right. Have you been given hypnotic instruction for any special behavior while here?"

"No."

"Do you intend any damage while here?"

"No."

"Okay." The smell changed to something sharp and acrid, and the figure on the side of his vision moved blurrily, fading back. *"You'll forget this. When you wake, you'll feel and act as if you'd just come in."* The smell was gone, and

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after some vague time the swirling feeling stopped abruptly.

He'd just stepped into the room. It was lighter than he had expected, and he stood blinking, waiting for his eyes to adjust. A woman was writing at a desk on his left. This was another office, but this one was bright and aseptic in white and grey, with the scientific look of a hospital—everything in clean precise squares and angles, with heavy medical books and scientific journals arranged neatly in grey metal shelves. *Medical and Biochemical,* he thought, classifying automatically. He glanced behind him. The door he had come through was flat and inconspicuous beside another door which stood between two banks of open shelves.

It looked like the door to a closet.

The desk was beautiful in grey ruled metal, with the weightless, floating effect of expensive design. A lucite light hose had been pulled out from its wall coil and arched back above the desk, sending down its beam of brilliance like a transparent cobra suspended in the act of striking.

The woman at the desk said, "Just a minute," without looking up and continued writing for a moment.

Then she looked up. She was middle-aged and small, with an air of restless energy and a thin pointed face with large eyes that her friends would probably call pixy-like. Her gaze was impersonal, her eyes flickering across his face and down to his hands then back to his face again thoughtfully as if he were making an effort to place an old acquaintance.

"E-2 control." She nodded. "You look like the pure type, too. I didn't think there would be any."

After a second he decided that he had not been mistaken for someone else who would have understood her.

"My name is Breden," he said. "I saw an advertisement."

"Six fingers," she nodded again. "We run that one once a year. It pulled in a few people last year too." She looked at him speculatively again. "The extra eye is recessive. You do have it, don't you?"

AGAIN he mastered the jolt that came with mentioning the thing which he had hidden so long. "Yes," he said, forcing the word out. And then the full implication of what she had said came through. There were others like him. They had seen the advertisement and come to this place before him. And they were important, very important, judging by the expense and secrecy used in locating them. He was the pure type, she had said.

"How old are you?" she asked.

He answered mechanically through the surge of his excitement. "Twenty eight." Leaning forward, he was unable to conceal his eagerness, and he no longer wanted to. "You mean that there are other people like me? I'm not the only one?"

She leaned back, beginning to smile. Her chair was metal, he saw with one corner of his mind, and cunningly designed metal joints in the chair gave with the motion.

Money, he thought again, automatically fitting facts together. *Inconspicuous swank. This place sells something medical.* Then he thought, in the first touch of rising fear, *This is routine to her. She doesn't treat me as if I were important.*

"The only one?" she repeated. Abruptly the woman laughed. "To put it bluntly—no." Smiling she reached into a desk drawer and took out a heavy catalogue. He glimpsed the cover, MSKZ LIVE BIOLOGICALS as she found a place in the thumb tab index and flattened it open, turning it so that he could see what was on the page. A double spread of twenty four diagramatic chromosomes were spaced across it, like twenty-four vertical strings of black and white beads, each bead numbered and explained in a listing at the bottom. At the upper left of the left page was an insert circle with the pho-

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tograph of a small, curled fetal figure.

Looking up at him with a smile she said, "You might be the only adult copy in existence. Except for that, Mister Breden, you are probably the least unique being in existence." She dropped her hand emphatically on the diagram of numbered chromosomes. "That's your chromosome set right there. At this moment there are probably several hundred thousand identical embyro copies of you from that chromosome set in use in all the genetics, cytology, endocrinology and geriatrics laboratories in the world. *Embryos*—not legally persons, not meant ever to be persons—being used as experimental animals, under the premise that they will never be men. In thirty years of use, hundreds of thousands of them have gone down the drain, advancing the knowledge of medicine and genetics immeasurably, and we are prepared to make and sell millions more. You are our diploid standard model E-2."

Smiling with a touch of impishness she waited for him to speak.

So this was the great secret.

He was a laboratory fetus accidentally grown up to be a human being. A laboratory animal! A million fetal copies of him were being experimented on, damaged, injured and mutilated in the experiments — dissected and casually thrown away as junk at each experiment's end! For a moment he could feel the scalpels and needles in his own flesh, the probes moving in his brain, the hypodermics plunging in deep with germs and poisons. *Flesh of my flesh, blood of my blood . . . a million mangling deaths, and it's what we were designed for legally, not for life. . . .*

The woman still leaned back pleasantly, showing mild friendliness and attention. She had told him cheerfully and without feeling, either not knowing or not caring what the information would do to him. The only emotion that he had seen in her since he entered was intellectual interest—an experimenter, one who experimented on E-2s.

HE STOOD with his hands resting at his sides and let the fury go off inside him like a silent explosion of firecrackers, rockets and pinwheels. When it died down he found himself still standing in the same position, lightly dewed with cold sweat, damp in the palms of his hands and shaking slightly, but he had not moved, and to the woman he could have just looked thoughtful. He had probably changed color but the artificial lights helped conceal that.

A habit of self control was a good thing, he thought. It can even carry you through an attack of madness.

"I didn't get the name," he said smoothly, hating the woman's aging pixy face and graying curly hair. *Why are you doing this?*

"Mirella Sorell."

"Doctor?"

"—of Philosophy—Biochemical." She was smiling slightly.

"Why are you doing this?" His voice seemed to have no connection with himself. It was urbane and polite, as if the question meant nothing.

She was still smiling. The overhead light left her eyes in shadow. "I could have said 'for money,' Mister Breden. That's always considered an honorable and adequate motive for any act. As long as one stays inside the law that answer is enough—no further questions are asked. Its only when one becomes tainted with beliefs or ideals or purposes that one becomes dangerous and an object of suspicion and ridicule and hostility. . . . Is that not so, E-2?"

He took the name stoically, and after a moment realized that by it she had meant a compliment. It indicated that she expected some extra quality of understanding or special insight from him by virtue of his being born to a letter and a number instead of a name. A compliment of a sort, but she had not answered what he wanted to know. He touched his lips with his tongue. "Why are you doing this?"

Sorell made a gesture of deprecation.

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"I'll tell you this much, Mister Breden—your genes were selected from some of the cream of humanity, the top men and women in atom power and radioactive tracer research, with I.Q.s of one hundred seventy and over. We managed to get our hands on these by taking a government research contract, where the government wanted to know if the genes of their scientists who had been exposed to sublethal radiation over long periods had more recessive-lethal mutations. The sperm and ova we took to answer the question we kept, and it gave us a good start in our classified gene bank."

"My abilities, I know about," he said. "Regardless of their history. What interests me is why these—these—"

"We wanted abnormalities. We needed a good control for crosses before we could go ahead in any other genetic research. Your characteristics had to be tagged with slight abnormalities and mixed racial differences which were plain enough to be visible in embryo. That way we could see what we were doing and judge the properties of each outcross into E-2 by watching the embryo develop and checking the number of E-2 alleles showing. Once we had the control gene set selected we not only used it ourselves, but we began to sell it. It has been priceless in a thousand laboratories. Almost thirty years of genetics research is based on E-2." She smiled. "We suspected that some geneticists might be tempted to follow their test crossbreeds past the embryo stage, even though it's strictly illegal. And they were tempted—obviously. Here *you* are, a sample of the pure strain, indicating someone needed you for a control check on another child."

THEY had trademarked him with peculiarities simply for purposes of recognition. He began to wonder if his question had any meaning. Could they be doing everything she described for mere scientific curiosity, without purpose, indifferent to the cost? Or was there some purpose hidden behind her evasions of his question? He asked, "You have me now—E-2, adult version. What do you want me for?"

"You could answer some questions first, and take a physical examination. You don't object?" There was a trace of mockery in her voice, and something quizzical in her expression, almost as if she were interested in his reactions, and observing them closely.

"Anything you say," he replied with bitterness. How much of this could he tell Nadine? And what good would it do him to tell her? If other things had not driven her away, why this new knowledge of what he was would certainly do it. *A laboratory guinea pig.* "How much secrecy is there in this business?"

"Very much secrecy," Sorell replied gravely. "We will explain later." She touched a button on her intercom box and switched off her desk light. "I'm leaving for the day, but I'll have someone show you around." She gathered up things from the desk and moved toward the door, adding absently. "There's a diploid meeting going on upstairs. I don't think many of them have left yet. If you can spare the time. . . ."

"I think so," Breden said. He remembered Nadine, waiting at the library for the news, added, "I can't stay long."

"Long enough to be introduced around, anyway," Sorell said at the door, and as a young man came in she introduced him hastily." Zal, this is E-2 control standard. Mr. Breden, this is EacrossZ, he can explain anything you want to know. If you don't mind, I have to leave now."

Zal Elberg shook hands firmly, saying over his shoulder to Sorell as she left, "G'night Mirella." He turned back to Breden. "Glad to meet you," he grinned. "She's a monomaniac. People aren't real to her, they're just carriers for genes. I also have a name, besides a gene file. Zal Elberg."

"Mart Breden," he said, puzzling over an odd familiarity in the young man's appearance. "What's going on up-

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stairs?" he then asked curiously.

"Sort of a party." Zal Elberg was shorter than Breden, but broad in the shoulders. He was handsome with rugged features, slightly slanting blue eyes and dark hair bristling up in a stiff crew cut. He was wearing a defiantly gaudy pink sport shirt. "Come on upstairs and join in. I'll answer your questions like a tourist guide."

V

ON THE way up in the escalator Mart saw that there was something odd about Zal Elberg's hands, and realized suddenly that there had been something odd about the feel of his handshake. Their fingers had meshed. Six fingers.

And the familiarity of Elberg's face —it was like his own, like a brother would look if he had a brother.

While Mart was absorbing the realization and trying to frame a question about it, they came to the right floor and walked towards the sound of mingled voices. They entered through a half open door into a big room with desks, file cabinets, computers and a standard laboratory work-table with a sink down the middle. It was filled with a mild babble of voices.

Mart's first impression was like a blare of colors; there were so many completely different personalities there, and they were so dissimilar. Most of them were eating sandwiches, drinking beer, and talking with intensity and excitement.

He took a deep breath and looked around more carefully, but his first impression was confirmed. They were all individuals—characters. They all deviated, and they all deviated in different directions, setting off each other's differences by the contrast of their own.

There was a long, drawn-out individual seated cross-legged on a table in a mediative pose listening to a very short individual who was telling a funny story. There was a short chubby girl of about 14, with buck teeth and the face of a happy baby loudly arguing some obscure mathematical point with a short, square, thick-armed young man who looked as if he had a dash of gorilla blood.

In the middle of the room was a lanky young man with a beaked nose that could have been used to slice bread. His hair was too long, and he sat on a stool quietly reading a magazine, eating a sandwich and swizzling from a bottle of beer. Two doll-like children on short stools drank milk and root beer and talked excitedly in shrill fluting voices about the Doppler effect.

Somehow this wasn't what he had expected.

"These are diploids?"

"Sure."

"But," he hesitated. He had expected that they would all look something like him or Zal, but the expectation suddenly seemed foolish. "Then what the blue blazes are diploids?"

Zal grinned and stepped forward to tap the lanky fellow on the shoulder. "Plink Plunk, what's a diploid? E-2 wants to know."

"Please," said the one addressed, putting down his beer bottle and turning his beaked face to them with slow dignity. "The name is Max P. Planck, or Planck-Planck, if you prefer, and the answer is, *I'm* a diploid. Who did you say wants to know?"

"E-2 control standard," Zal said, reaching up and putting a hand on Mart's shoulder. "He's just come in."

The thin one offered his hand gravely. "I'm glad you found us. Do you know that E-2 has been the anchor to windward of an entire generation of biological research? The world owes the E-2 set a great deal. What's your real name by the way?"

"Mart—er—Paul Breden."

"Mine is really Max Planck-Planck, but these discourteous characters have no concept of dignity." He indicated Zal. "They call me Plink Plunk, or Plunk-Plink or Plunk-Plunk. What have you been called?"

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"Martian."

The skinny young man made a slight bend of the shoulders that implied a bow. "Thank you, Mr. Breden. I take it, being a newcomer, that you are eager for an explanation." He glanced at Zal. "Mister Elberg, would you see that our guest is properly provided for?"

"Sure. Swiss with white or rye?" Zal asked Breden. "Beer or ale?"

The sight of the food around him had set his stomach gnawing at itself for minutes.

"Ale," he said gratefully.

"Right away," said Zal and went off toward a big white refrigerator. Planck-Planck continued.

"Although I do not work with MSKZ I am almost uniquely provided among diploids to explain the process of diploiding. The others being kept in the dark as to their individual inheritance, to avoid any influence of expectation on their behavior, I am one of the few fully able to explain precisely my own origins."

Nearby, the two children of the doll-like incredible beauty were now arguing dogmatically about the latest stellar evolution theory, and Max Planck-Planck raised his voice slightly to compensate. "I'm the only one who thus has his proper name, and these buffoons are jealous."

Zal returned with a cold plastibottle of ale and two sandwiches. He set them down on the laboratory table beside them.

Breden remembered what he had read of the great mathematician and physicist. "Are you related to Max Planck?" he asked with respect, peeling the pliofilm shell from his sandwich.

"Closely," said the skinny young man with precision, hitching himself around in his stool and closing his hand on the neck of his beer bottle. "He's the one person that I am related to. To be exact, I represent half of his chromosome set, doubled up to a full set, so that some of his characteristics I have in double strength, and others, dominant genes which shaped him, I don't have at all, just the other of the gene pair, doubled in me so that it comes out, while it was just an unused recessive for him. MSKZ was probably trying to double the genius genes and get a double genius, but my friends say that obviously they doubled the wrong half."

He paused and took a thoughtful swallow from the bottle. "The number of different people with different combinations of traits you can get from one man's genes, after nature has done its job of haploiding—randomly selecting one set of twenty-four from two sets of twenty-four—is I think, factorial twenty-four, or twenty-four plus twenty-three plus twenty-two and so on. It comes to some large number. I can't say precisely because I'm no mathematician; I'm a musician. *She* could tell you." He indicated the plump, baby-faced girl who was still discussing something incomprehensibly mathematical with the gorilla-like young man. "I suspect that May, there, is another diploided Planck set. I think she represents the opposite half set, allowing for embryo mortality to weed out the doubled lethals. I think she is probably the Hyde to my Jekyll. Neither of us look at all like Max Planck." He waved a hand from her to himself." Can you explain why one of us is fat and the other thin?"

BREDEN thought of suggesting that she might eat more, but decided that it was a remark inappropriate to an academic discussion of heredity. He found himself liking the courtly, ugly young man he was talking with, and possessed of a strong desire to call him Plunk Plunk.

The gorilla-like young man and the girl who was probably a sister of Max Planck-Planck were now engaged in detaching the two little children from their root beer bottles and their argument and herding them toward the door, still arguing. "Aw, that's not right." "It is too!" Seen in motion they were even more unreally pretty, a Hollywood idealization of children.

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"Who are those kids?" Breden indicated them as they went out.

"Sales Package," Zal answered for Planck-Planck. "They're for people who want beautiful children. Will Your Child Be A TV Star? If the customers have no brains of their own that's all they'll want, but brains and health and all the mutant improvements we can collect from all the populations of the world will be in the same package. We'll need a wide selection of different kinds of beauty to have sets that will closely match the purchasers. The customers won't mind that they have quiz kids, as long as they are born naturally to Momma and look like Momma or Papa and are pretty enough to compete with movie kids. They'll think of them as their own kids and be flattered by any extra abilities that are thrown into the bargain. Trouble is, beauty is something we can't check in embryo to see how the crosses come out. It will take fifty more years. We'll need plenty more test kids like Em and Ben before we can advertise."

"These scientist characters work themselves like Simon Legree worked Uncle Tom," commented Planck-Planck. "Fifty more years of work he mentions like planning a weekend. My work plans extend to the age of thirty when I shall retire to a hammock and fiddle or compose music in a recumbent position. All this work, and for what?"

"For supermen," Zal said in a very low voice, so that Breden barely heard him. The word was a shock, although he had been touching the edges of the idea for days. It sounded like something for the far future, not to be casually mentioned as a project.

"Supermen we have," Planck-Planck said mildly. "At least that is what the supers claim to be, and so far they . . . ."

Zal interrupted, speaking to Breden hurriedly. "Would you like to meet another fourth of MSKZ?"

Breden felt a surge of the subconscious hostility he had felt for Mirella Sorell at the mention of the organization name. MSKZ had him in its catalogues. MSKZ sold gene duplicates of him for experimental purposes. "That's rather a large order," he said casually, concealing his resentment. "I haven't time to meet the whole organization. It's. . . ."

Zal laughed. "It's not an *it*, it's a *them*. MSKZ are the initials of the team that runs MSKZ. You've met Sorell. She's S." He indicated a man sitting on the other side of the room. "That's K over there—Keith. He's in town this week. I'll introduce you to him."

The pale blond man sitting across the room had been easy to ignore, but now that he had been pointed out Breden could see that he was not a diploid. He was too normal, and he lacked some extra charge of vitality that made the others relatively conspicuous. When they walked over he looked up inquiringly, and Breden saw that he was greying and considerably older than anyone in the room. The diploids were all young.

"Mart," said Zal, "I want you to meet Anson Keith, one of the guys responsible for this outfit being started. Responsible for you being here, too." He put his hand on Breden's arm. "And Keith," Zal continued, "I want you to meet Mart Breden. He's the first E-2 to show up."

Keith rose to shake hands. He was big and thick-boned, the kind built to carry muscle and fat, but there wasn't any fat on him, and not much muscle. His hand was bony in Breden's hand—he was thin in the same way Sorell had been thin, wasted out in the fires of too much work without enough food or rest, with enthusiasm giving a life and energy to his face that denied its lines. "E-2, are you?" Interest shone in his eyes, and he pulled a note pad and pencil from his pocket with a practiced motion. "Do you have wisdom teeth?"

ANOTHER person to whom he was just E-2. Breden smiled faintly. "No." Another diploid, a tall sturdy girl, entered the room through a swinging bookcase that was evidently a secret door, and sat down quietly with a magazine and a sandwich. Breden was not

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surprised by the door. It fitted with the signs of secrecy that he had observed, and with the way Zal had just interrupted Planck-Planck to prevent him from giving some information that had to do with the incredible word—supermen. There was something obviously undercover about the organization of MSKZ, and something illegal about its activities.

"Good. We hoped you might have that allele." Smiling, Keith made a note. "It had been one chance in four. I'm glad you came in. You settled something we were in doubt about with the E-2 set. We can follow up that line now. Any dental work ever needed?"

"No." Breden found himself hating the greying blond man, hating his normal Caucasian face, his narrow five-digited hands and his evident intelligence, just as he had hated Mirella Sorell. He hated them as a chess pawn would hate the players who moved the pawns. He was just an experiment with a number to them. As a long range result of their experiment he had lost Nadine—lost any chance of any kind of marriage. They had done it by making a freak of him.

Keith made a note. "That seems to be hopeful. There's a faint probability that one of the E line got a gene for self-repairing teeth in the shuffle. We couldn't check that in embryo, and even if your teeth continue in good shape we can't be sure it isn't coincidence unless one of them is knocked out and we see whether it grows back in."

"I'll have someone knock one out for you." Breden said drily.

Looking at him more sharply, Keith folded his notebook and put it away. "Is there something I could do for you—something you might like to discuss?"

He had decided what he could do. Breden took a deep breath and said softly, "I'd like to know what is there in your program that justifies my being born with an extra astigmatic eye? It seems to me I owe you nothing for that. Life itself is a meaningless gift, for no one misses life when it is not given. It's the quality of life that's important, and for that *you* were responsible. But you don't acknowledge your responsibility. You don't ask what your distortions may have cost me, or what I may have lost by them."

Breden had always angered slowly; he was angering now. "If your routine plans had their way, the geneticist who incubated me—supposedly for his experiments—would have sent me the usual way of the scalpel and the ashcan. I don't owe you anything for that either. Oh yes, I accidentally escape the ashcan, and so you greet me cheerfully and ask about the condition of my teeth, inquiring in effect what more I can do for you." Although he kept his voice at conversational pitch the words were intense, and as Keith listened, Breden got the impression that everyone in the room was listening, keeping up their previous activities and conversation without change, but bending an interested ear to the remarks the newcomer was making to Keith.

"Do any of these experiments—" he indicated those in the room—"who are taken in by this good-of-humanity mishmash actually owe you anything?"

Zal, leaning against a table reading a technical journal, said, "Diploids of the world, arise." He turned a page blandly. "Go on, Mart."

"For the sake of the future of mankind—" Keith began mildly.

"Propaganda! Does the white rat owe any duty to mankind because he is the subject of experiments? No, he owes duty to his own kind—to humanity he owes only hatred, because he is being used and sacrificed by humanity. An enemy."

He had maneuvered himself back against the bank of filing cabinets, and he could feel the reassuring weight of the curare gun in his pocket. The gun which was also a radio signal mechanism to call the police if it were fired. The police would probably be very interested in secret doors and whatever lay beyond

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them. "You know," he said, suddenly mild, "I could cause you people a lot of trouble."

There was a vague kind of motion in the room, a slight reshifting of positions so that there were more people between him and the door, though they still were not looking at him. Zal glanced around and suddenly laid down his magazine, his expression changing.

Keith sat down, seeming politely attentive, his expression a mask hiding his thoughts. "I find your viewpoint interesting, Mr. Breden. Other people have tried to convince me to see things in that light before, but not quite so rapidly as you seem to have arrived at your conclusions. Would you say you have chosen sides, then?" The urbanity was not natural to the man; it was camouflaging something else.

Very clearly, speaking to Breden alone, Zal said. "Mart, look; this isn't good. You're going off half cocked. You're in some kind of bad mood." His voice was low, but the repressed urgency of his tone made what he meant as emphatic as a shout. "Before you do anything, how about going out and walking it off? You're not thinking clearly right now."

As he became aware of it, Mart could hear the pulse pounding in his ears and the stiff tension of his hands, the way he had been leaning forward on the balls of his feet unconsciously in anticipation and hope that someone would attack him. What he wanted was a good stupid old-fashioned brawl. He wanted to work off his rage and pain against something tangible. He had been talking through a fog of hatred for what seemed like hours, like a drunk precariously giving the impression he was sober.

"We can talk it over later," Zal said softly, watching him with eyes that had doubtless seen similar expressions in the mirror on his own similar face. Keith watched the two of them without remark or motion.

With an effort of decision Breden pulled his hand stiffly from his pocket and relaxed. "I have an appointment," he apologized to Keith.

To Zal he muttered, "See you sometime." People between him and the door hesitated briefly as he walked toward them, and for a moment he hoped they would try to stop him. His hands clenched, but there was no sound from Keith and his fellow diploids stepped aside.

VI

NOW he was outside, still walking in his private fog. Nade, he thought. Then in an ironical flash that seemed to come from some separate place in himself that didn't ache like the rest. You're in love, brother.

Judging by the way it felt, people in love should be locked up to beat their heads against white padded walls until the fit passed. There was a tiny element of doubt that made it worse, for that meant he would have to force her to say it herself. Being sure what her reaction would be wasn't enough; he would have to hear it.

Then he was in a televiewer booth with Nadine looking at him, close, very close, but nothing but only a picture with the hard touch of glass. She was far away in the library, out of reach. "Are you all right, Mart? It was bad news, wasn't it."

He didn't speak for a moment, looking at her then said, "Secret."

"Secret," she repeated with a small motion of crossing her heart. It was a promise not to tell.

"I'm some sort of a lousy genetics experiment," he said bluntly. "Not even anything special, just a test run." He looked at the screen image of Nadine—the beautiful hair and eyes, the slim five fingered hands, the notebook and library cards she was carrying, the cards scrawled on in larger more irregular letters than usual, her hair slightly mussed on top from a habit she had of running her fingers into it when nervous. Signs of waiting. "Don't wait for me when you

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get through, Nadine, go on home."

"Is it hereditary?" The picture looked at him. It was hard to tell with a picture, but it looked white, and it looked as if it might be crying.

"It's hereditary."

Then it seemed they were going to switch off, and suddenly he had to know, he had to be sure.

"Nade, would you marry a three-eyed freak, a lousy laboratory experiment?"

Her voice came controlled and dead-sounding. "No Mart, I wouldn't."

Then both screens were blank and he sat in the dark televiewer booth, trying to remember who had hung up first. "See you," he said absently, but the connection was cut and she could not hear him now.

"I'd marry for children." Had she said that? She had said it once in a discussion of something else several months ago, and he could hear her voice as if she had just said it. "I'm sorry for myself, Mart, losing you." That was a good thing to have said, he hoped that she had really said it.

Numbly, Mart Breden left the televiewer booth and began to walk. He walked carefully, balancing his numbness and trying not to disturb it, as a man would carry a fragile vase. Whatever his feelings were, he would feel them later; for now, for the moment, he had no emotions. He could see the things around him very clearly—buildings, sidewalk, people, trees—and he could think with an odd effect of being distant from himself, seeing the point of view of Keith and Sorell.

Scientists are not trained to consider individuals. Their philosophy and practice included a daily practice of inflicting small immediate losses to win long range large gains. The MSKZ team of biologists, when they had added a line of stereotyped human fetuses to their selection of standardized stereotyped laboratory animals, had probably done so with the full expectation that some of them would be carried illegally to term in the incubators by purchasers, and birthed as physical misfits into a world of people differently shaped from themselves. The results in psychological loss could easily have been predicted, and probably was something the biologists took into account and disregarded as not particularly important.

And in the long run, he supposed, it probably wasn't important. . . .

TRAFFIC hummed in the sky over the skyscrapers, circling in changing interweaving patterns as radar control patterns changed with the gradually diminishing load, and the commuters' 'copters streamed away from the city. The sky had darkened to a transparent deep blue, and the street lights were beginning to glow. A little way behind him a man in a gray overcape was walking almost in step with him, but Mart ignored him and walked blindly, trying to keep himself walking away from the thing that had happened to him. Hating was no good as a solution, and letting it hurt was no good either. He had to think, to grasp and understand it as a pattern of events that was natural, something that was inevitable, and had to be—before he could let himself feel.

He had to keep thinking, asking logical questions. What had Sorell said was the reason for them giving the E-2s the extra eye?

There were few pedestrians now, and only one convertible air-ground car parked on the block between himself and the door to MSKZ. It was a business section without restaurants, and so always almost totally deserted during the dinner hours.

As he came opposite the parked car he saw that there were some people sitting in it, and simultaneously a hand touched his arm. "Are you sure you want to go back to MSKZ?"

Breden turned. He had assumed indifferently that the follower was some arrangement of MSKZ, but now this stranger's presence became something that rang along his nerves like the clangor of an alarm bell. The presence of the

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follower implied that MSKZ and the National Counseling Service had enemies to whom their secret purposes were known and familiar, enemies as secretive as their own hidden goals.

The man insisted. "You shouldn't go in there without knowing something about it." Out of the sides of his eyes Mart could see the black air-road convertible at the curb. Inside, shrouded in the half darkness, was the pale blur of two faces and the twin small glows of cigarettes.

Waiting for me, thought Mart. The follower had waited and had not spoken to him until they were both opposite the car. A quick silent shot from an illegal hypo-gun and a quick ordering of him into the car—and then what? Why should anything of the sort happen? His only known enemy was a lunatic inventor who had singled him out as the source of his demented persecution. A madman who thought he was either a Martian or a diploid.

But he was a diploid! Did that make a target of him in some way he couldn't conceive? Was the mere fact of his existence a provocation for murder? Why hadn't Keith explained this and warned him? Mart measured the distance to the door of MSKZ and considered the amount of time it would take the man beside him to free a hypno gun from under his cape. There was time enough if he ran. But running would be ridiculous; you don't run from a surmise. And pulling out his curare pistol, or pushing the buttonpush that would summon the police would seem equally ridiculous to rational outsiders.

"If you could give us a few minutes —" a tense voice interrupted his thoughts—"you could find out what we have to say," the man continued, watching his face as if looking for hesitation. "There are things about MSKZ you should know."

HE WAS a small man, with sharply cut features, and the skin was tight over the bones of his face as if he were in fear, holding in check a great fear of the door labeled MSKZ BIOLOGICAL SUPPLIES. Looking at Mart's hesitation he smiled, and his face changed and seemed younger until he seemed less than twenty, perhaps a kid who had learned to pass as an adult. He held out his hand.

"My name is John Eskhart." The smile seemed friendly and eager.

Beginning an answering smile Mart grasped the extended hand.

And felt the needle with its hypnotic contents sink into his palm.

He had about five seconds before the hypnotic would return in the circulating blood from his arm and reach his brain. He reached for his pocket to push the button in the radio signaler and summon the police. John Eskhart gripped his arm and stopped the motion. The man was small and light, but the full weight of even a small person clinging to his arm would make it impossible to get his hand into his pocket. With a sudden yank Mart pulled free and ran for the doorway of MSKZ. There were only a few seconds left.

There was no sound of anyone running after him, but when he was ten feet from the door John Eskhart's voice reached him very clearly.

"There's no hurry. You don't have to go in just yet."

No hurry. He found himself slowing as he reached for the door. *No hurry . . . don't have to go in. . . .*" He hesitated trying to remember why he had been hurrying.

Behind him Eskhart's voice said, "You do want to find out what we can tell you about MSKZ before you go in there. Don't fight it, man, we're friends."

Friends. He could have laughed at that, but then as the hypnotic swirled darkly up into his mind, he believed, and turned to walk back. They held the car door open for him. . . .

The only thing of which he was conscious was a voice, or was it several voices?

"No human could genuinely love you.

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People who said they loved you were pretending. Your parents—"

"No." He tried to pull away from the awful words, knowing they were not true, but they came into his mind in a steady flow, each sentence with its own burning belief and pain.

"Only your own kind, only those of the diploids who have not been misled to favor humanity can be your friends."

"No," he thought, but the ideas burnt their way in. He tried to wake up to escape from the voice, but it came remorselessly.

"Compared to average humanity you are a freak. You are only at home among your own kind. The friends you have had were not your friends."

Nade . . . no. He struggled to pull himself up out of the dream, and suddenly there was the sight of a gray ceiling and a male arm. He had succeeded in opening his eyes. He lay looking at the ceiling, victorious, but oddly without any wish to look around.

"He learns resistance to drugs like learning to recite 'Mary Had A Little Lamb'," said a voice disgustedly. It sounded like the same voice, but this time it was a real voice, outside of him, and not a voice in his mind.

"Okay, switch to octo-hypno and take him down again. It's a good thing we blacklisted the E strain—I never would have believed it without seeing this." It was another person, but this voice sounded like the other, like the man or youth who had called himself John Eskhart.

"We can't have these recalcitrants and immunes—they're dangerous."

"Diploids must control." These voices were younger, but still alike.

"He's a diploid too. You mean supers must control."

"You two are talking like hypno indoctrination formulas." This was an older voice. "*You* don't have to take that literally. Words are just words. We follow what we feel."

Obligingly Mart held still for an injection, feeling friendly and tolerant, because these were his friends. As his senses ebbed again, he wondered of what famous man all these John Eskharts were the diploid descendants. These anti-MSKZ diploids had called themselves "supers" in his hearing, but even as supers, what would they do with this "control" if they had it? Who could genuinely control any part of such a jumble of events? An image of Nade, her face flushed and earnest leaning forward with her hands planted on his desk. *"If all the political experts, intellectuals, economists, sociologists, and general geniuses who ought to know how to run things better—plus all their brains, success, money, and positions of power can't get control of what's going on—"*

"Package of Jello—" he murmured to himself smiling. Then he felt an inexplicable wave of loss and desolation, and escaped from it into the drugged darkness.

MSKZ BIOLOGICAL SUPPLIES said the lettering on the door. It was much later in the evening, about nine thirty, and he was hungry again, but before eating there were important things he had to do for the supers and for himself. Some time during the evening he would use his curare pistol, and some time during the evening he would use the button push in his pocket to call the police. It would have to be done with a careful timing that was vague to him now.

But he knew he would remember when the time came.

The door was unlocked and there was a light in the hall. He wedged a matchbook cover into the lock to make sure it would stay unlocked and left the door slightly ajar for *someone* who would be following. Then he switched on the escalator and went up to the second floor, where he could hear the distant sound of conversation.

There were fewer people than before, and the conversation had grown more subdued. Breden looked around and

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was suddenly let down from a tenseness he had not recognized in himself. He had been ready to do something in connection with Keith being there. What it was, he did not know.

The fluorescent pink shirt drew his eye to where Zal was holding forth to Planck-Planck and the tall heavy girl who had come in through the secret door when he was last there. Zal was explaining, gesturing occasionally with a technical magazine he had clutched in one hand. "Or, better yet, a small operation on the father will replace his sperm manufacturing tissue with our own improved gene-carrying substitute, and permit him to take care of fertilization in his own way. A rather more complicated operation will do the same for a woman." He added regretfully, "We need to make it all easier than that before we can sell on a large scale. These operations are too expensive, and people are generally afraid of operations anyhow."

Zal grinned at him as he approached. "Hello Mart, how'd it go?"

"I cooled off," Breden said, smiling briefly. He liked this husky slant-eyed kid who looked like him. But he had to appear ignorant and innocent as if he had not learned things and chosen sides against MSKZ while he was gone. "By the way Zal, what's the secret door for?"

"For ourselves," Zal waved at it casually. "We just like to have it handy. It leads to a secret room where we keep things we don't want stolen and work on gadgets we don't want made public. We need defenses, and we don't want to broadcast the fact or get the police in on it."

"Defenses against what?" Asking the question he realized that he did not know much of the answer. He knew which side he was on, but the reason for the fight . . . MSKZ was run by the team of MSKZ, biologists—human, non-diploid human, and for some reason they opposed direct action by diploids who were interested in some kind of political activity. It was all vague and sketchy, though he could have sworn the details had been explained to him and he had been persuaded by logic.

"Some of our diploid geniuses go a little wild. They go all out for being supermen with a capital S and want to conquer the world—manufacture a million type copies of themselves for an army." Zal grinned at Breden with some friendly mockery in his expression. "There must be a lot of pleasure in the idea of shaking hands with yourself and forming a mutal admiration society, huh?"

"A lot of pleasure," Breden agreed gravely. Brothers closer than brothers, fellowship and understanding to end the loneliness of being different and separate and unable to join wholeheartedly with the people around you. Loneliness can become so basic that a whole personality is built on it. Who would know better than a diploid?

Of all mankind, only MSKZ had the power to make duplicates.

Soberly Zal said, "Diploiding as a process brings out all kinds of hidden hereditary weaknesses in the strain. We can weed out the physical defects by spotting them in embryo, but we can't see the mental defects until the child is born. Some of our incross geniuses have turned out sort of nuts. They've organized together in a separate faction, and they've tried to steal their egg files from the gene bank a couple of times, and they tried to take MSKZ once when all four of them were here, to hold them hostage until the organization produced and birthed a half army of baby duplicates and found homes for them at random."

Breden blinked, reconsidering the last casual statement. "What help could they get from babies?"

Zal nodded, "No help at first. But we can't kill off babies, once they are developed, and babies grow up. The chances are good that every one would grow up just like his adult prototype—a genius. But from the strictly humanoid point of

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view, more than half crazy, with drives completely tangent to the main line of human ambition, born enemies to everything that's human. For them it's a straight-out issue of dominate or be dominated. They'd make an army all right." The other two were listening soberly to this recital of a situation they all knew. They looked grave and thoughtful, as if they foresaw danger and possible defeat. Zal went on seriously:

"It's been something of a private war between us. We fight each other quietly with hypnosis and gadgets that won't attract police attention. Both factions have invented some good gadgets, too. It's not a big war, but it's serious enough. If the public ever got wind of any of this, all hell would break loose. And if the renegades were to get hold of Self Perfection, they could plant their own type copies on a million women, to be born normally instead of incubated, and the country would be swamped with them."

Breden remembered a similarity of voices he had heard somewhere recently, and his curiosity about them. "Are many of the supers the same type copy, I mean, from the same person?".

VII

THERE was no doubt in Breden's mind that he was for the supers and would help them as much as he could, but he needed to know something about them. It had to seem like a casual question.

Zal did not seem to have noticed anything different about his manner. He answered slowly, "Let's see . . . Keith and Mac don't spill much. We don't know our own eggs, generally, but Keith told me something about this line when it started making trouble. He needed a good healthy outcross to mix in, because most of the star genius lines have traditionally moved around the world so much and outcrossed so much that there hasn't been any inbreeding in their background which would weed out the accumulation of lethal recessives, so diploiding shows up too much physical weakness. For the cross, Keith scouted around and picked up a batch of gamete-producing tissue from a healthy inbred high I.Q. family from one of those inbred southern small towns that get into the sex and scandal novels. The crossing strengthened the other strains, but those kids mostly grew up with an odd personality, all misfits the same way, not liking anybody but each other. Their organization has pulled in other misfits, but the kids of the F line of crosses have been the nucleus and center of it. That southern family strain personality was as dominant as the Hapsburg lip."

"Probably," commented Planck-Planck, "the reason why the town had been inbreeding and staying to itself. All a bullheaded lot who don't like strangers and won't marry anyone but cousins."

Breden glanced at a catalogue lying open on the table. "*MSKZ original house for genetic identicals since 1968. If you need precise standardized animal reactions for comparison experiments, and are dissatisfied with the variability of ordinary inbred animals, we can accept any special strain of experimental animal you find suitable, and from it provide you with two strains of genetically homogeneous males and genetically homogeneous females, one or more of each, all of whose progeny will be genetically identical male twins. You can breed them to any quantity you require.*" There was a repeating frieze of tiny identical rabbits bordering the page. Breden remembered the page with the curled embryonic figure that was E2 . . . *experimental animals. . . .*

He shut the catalogue hastily.

"When is Keith coming back?"

Zal was still talking. "Naturally Keith discontinued the F strain and started looking for another for a base. That's what started most of the fighting. They want MSKZ to make more of the F type crosses like themselves, and we won't."

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Planck-Planck said, "Frankly, if this is the way superhumanity is going to behave, I don't see that the world of the future will be any calmer than the world of the present."

"Who wants calm?" Zal observed.

"Superman," Mart said, as though he had not heard. The word still sounded fantastic. "I thought only the supers used that word."

"Oh, we use it too. It's just that we're not so looping superior about it." Planck-Planck glanced down at his skinny length with a wry smile. "I'm a superman—you're a superman, anyone over I.Q. 140 is enough of a superman to do in a pinch. They're using the Wallace corn technique in breeding. Incrosses are always frail and idiosynchratic compared to what comes next. If you want what you would call supermen, just let MSKZ go along selecting the cream of the world's health and ability and incrossing—diploiding them—letting selection weed out weakness—and see what happens when they start combining what's left into outcrosses."

ZAL made a mystic sign of propitiation to luck. "That's my job," he breathed reverently. "Keep your fingers crossed; we've already started. In fact, we have some kids adopted out. Brother, the F strain outcrosses haven't a chance! If they can't figure a way to capture or stop MSKZ now, they'll be calling themselves subs."

The tall heavy girl came in the front door and set a large plastic container with a spigot on the table beside them. "Hot coffee," she announced to the room. "Anyone who wants it, come ladle it out."

"Look," Mart said, trying to get the attention of the two friendly halfwits as they reached for coffee. "Could you tell me when Keith is coming back? Someone was supposed to give me an examination."

Somewhere in the room behind him Keith said distinctly, "Ahem." He was standing near the secret door, and looked as if he had been standing there for some time. "I am examining you, Mr. Breden." He smiled slightly. "You move like a dancer—you seem to have more vitality than anyone here. Is it something you learned how to do? Self training?"

Mart hesitated, trying to understand the question of the tall man with pale hair who should have known him in advance as the E2 pattern. Keith read his hesitation, and stopped moving in the midst of reaching for a coffee cup.

"Man, do you mean to say that you are genuinely not crippled? That all those structural abnormalities *work?* I expected some kind of physical and mental wreck. The kind of topblowing you were doing in here earlier was about what I expected psychologically, but Doctor Sheers reported that you were more stable than I am, friendly and accessible even with all that included rejection stress." He drew himself some coffee and walked over to his desk to sit down. "And Mirella reports that you were hellishly poised. What's the trick, man? Nothing should have been strong about you but those teeth, and here you are back gabbing with my zoo, healthy as a gorilla and more sure of yourself than I am."

"I'm only poised from five to nine and alternate weekends." Mart allowed himself a slight grin. He couldn't afford to like Keith—Keith was the enemy—but it was getting difficult not to. "I'm only friendly on hours whose names begin with T." It was time. Abruptly he walked over to the wall and put his back against the filing cabinets. He raised his voice. *"Nobody can leave the room."* He took the curare gun out of his pocket and leveled it at Keith.

"I've already chosen sides," he explained boldly to the suddenly silent room. "I chose the supers."

"Oye!" Zal clapped himself on the forehead exclaiming in an undertone. "I let him go out alone and the supers got him! There was dismay behind the joke.

Mart smiled at that. Someone moved

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stealthily, and he swung the curare pistol a little towards him, saying clearly, "I would like to point out that if I find it necessary to fire, a radio signal will bring the police. Don't forget that there are laws against human experimenting. The Anti-Vivisection League will interest itself in the use of E-2 embryos and doubtless find that most laboratories let them run past five months. A post five month embryo is considered legally human, so the Anti-Vivisection League would carry the case to court and stand guard over all the post-five-month embryos to see that they are birthed when they come to term. That would give me fifty duplicates or so." He smiled around the room at unsmiling faces.

"You'd destroy all of MSKZ for a lousy fifty replicas?" asked the gorilla-like young man who had not previously spoken to him. He was angry. "What would you do with them when you had them, play ring-around-the-rosey?"

IN BREDEN'S pocket the button push that would call the police was growing slippery from contact with the fingers of his left hand. He was trying to push it, but something seemed to be holding his tensed hand back from completing the motion.

Planck-Planck hiked himself gangling up on the edge of a table facing him. "We can talk it over. You want to give MSKZ unfavorable publicity in order to have your replicas birthed. You have decided that MSKZ owes you something, and you want to take it out in replicas, right?"

That wasn't what he wanted. Breden hesitated. What did he want? He remembered Nadine again. He had lost her. There was nothing like knowing the truth, even if knowing it never helped. "Mister Planck-Planck," he said coldly, "I don't need a reason, I'm just expressing my feelings. Somebody owes me something for making me a freak, and if I don't take it out in replicas, I'll take it out in hide." If only someone would attack him, he thought wistfully; if only he had an excuse for hitting someone, preferably Keith. He made another try at pushing the button and this time succeeded.

With an odd mingling of satisfaction and depression he realized that he had called the police. If he didn't let them shut the secret door, if he made them remain to be questioned, MSKZ as an organization was dead. And then he knew that the whole thing was unreal. Something else was going to happen. The door to the hall, the door downstairs that opened to the darkened street both stood ajar, open and waiting. For . . . he found his finger too tense on the trigger and relaxed it, turning the gun carefully away from Keith's face.

The members of MSKZ and the diploids did not know that he had sent a call signal.

Zal was saying seriously, "Don't argue with him. Can't you see that he's been hypnoed?"

"He can't be, Zal. The supers wouldn't have him calling the police; not if they hypnoed him. The police hypno questioning would be too likely to show up what they had done to him, and you know there's a penalty in the anti-hypnotic law for making people catspaws. They have more to lose by it than we have."

"If he's catspaw for them, they don't have to give him the inside dope on what he's doing. Any story will do." Zal turned to him. "Mart, as a favor, could you tell me where you went between six and nine?"

"I was met by some supers," he answered, feeling that he was breaking some obscure instructions in answering, yet easily able to do it. "They persuaded me to enlist on their side."

"How much did they tell you? Can you remember what arguments they used to persuade you?" Zal was earnest, leaning forward with interest.

He hesitated, a vast confusion flooding into his mind and subsiding again. He had been sure he had discussed the subject with the supers for a long time and

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been informed and chosen his own side reasonably, but—"I can't remember any specific arguments." The supers were still his friends and these were his enemies, but it was better to know the facts.

"He was hypnoed," Planck-Planck said. "That makes him completely unpredictable. We don't know what he's standing here with his gun for, because he doesn't either. Not only do we have to look after ourselves now, but we have to look after him."

"You're probably quite right," said Breden, suddenly liking him without caring which side he was on. There was an odd stir in the room. Planck-Plank looked at him directly and keenly, without stirring. "Mister Breden, you know that people with post hypnotic commands on them are also commanded to forget what was done to them. You are not supposed to be able to admit that you can't remember, and you are definitely not supposed to recognize any possibility that you have been influenced to do what you are doing. How do you account for your own behavior?"

BREDEN remembered something. It was a disturbing memory, but the sound of the words was quite clear. "They said I learned resistance to drugs like learning a nursery rhyme." He found the gun muzzle was pointing at Keith's face again and shifted it, remembering the police warning not to shoot anyone in the eye. His gun hand was growing tense, and there was a feeling of instructions he was about to remember. . . .

Keith had been leaning back in his desk chair, watching Breden with a cool, studying expression. "It's probably true. In all the hundreds or thousands of generations of division and selection of the E-2 cells within our incubators the only possible evolution that could have gone on was evolution in the direction of chemical adaptability, since only the chemical environment varied. If this happened, Breden, it means that biochemically you are something like twenty thousand years ahead of the rest of us. At that rate I think you should be able to pull yourself out of any effect from external drugs without any help from us."

Breden found himself swallowing painfully. "This is good news. . ." It came out as half a whisper, and he pulled himself together with an effort, trying to forget what he had just heard, and to remember what he was supposed to do. He shifted the direction of the gun absently away from Keith's face.

"If this is so," Keith continued, his eyes straying from Mart's face to the gun and back. "Then it answers the question of why you are so healthy. That kind of adaptability could probably fit any random kind of physical structure together and make it work."

Mart suddenly felt the health of his body as a physical sensation, and the gun in his hand which he was pointing at this quiet room full of people seemed totally incongruous. He was following instructions, but he had no enthusiasm for it now. He was doing it only as a favor to the supers. They were his friends, they were with him in his fight against humanity. Fight against humanity. . . .

A second of silence had passed and Zal exploded impetuously, "For heaven's sake, Mart! Put that damn gun down. Don't you see you're holding us for some kind of a trap?"

"The supers are my friends. I'm doing what they want."

"That's hypnosis talking. Fight it."

"I don't want to fight it," Breden said reasonably. "I want to help them." If the button push was to have brought the police, they would have been here minutes ago. Something prickled along the back of his neck. Just what kind of a trap had his friends prepared for MSKZ? Why hadn't they told him? He hoped it was no worse than hypno-conversion.

"I suggest," Planck-Planck said softly, "that the F line of supers know something about the E-2 abilities and are afraid of being displaced. They have

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worked out some plausible way of eliminating Breden, who is E-2's only living representative."

"This was to be a trap for him, and not for us."

"Mart," Zal's voice was strained, "For God's sake, take care of yourself. Don't just stand there."

He was fighting now, trying to open his hand and drop the gun. He could feel the tension straining the muscles of his arm right up to the shoulder, and the surging and growth of the feeling of obligation, the feeling of obedience to the supers that fought to keep the gun in his hand, wavering, pointing. . . .

Pointing in the general direction of the lined face of the big blond man who was sitting so close, leaning back in his desk chair, occasionally glancing from Breden's eyes to the gun. They probably could have jumped then and taken the gun away from him, but everyone in the room knew that they could not risk the chance that his finger would contract on the trigger, for one shot would bring the police, and a hypno question to any of them about the shot would bring out enough of the story to retrograde forty years of MSKZ'S work in genetics and make it once more into a simple supply house for laboratory animals.

It was up to him. "I don't believe they are against me," he said, "but I. . . ." He tried. His eyes fogging with the effort, he glanced up at a sound, looking past Keith's face toward the half open door on the far side of the room.

YARDLY DEVON stood there, a slim old man dressed in pearl grey. A hat was rakishly on the side of his head; his face was smoothly shaven and pink, and in his hand was the blue-steel glimmer of an old fashioned automatic. "I heard you," he told Breden.

For a moment he clearly remembered his instructions. He was supposed to shout and start pulling the trigger of the curare pistol wildly in Devon's general direction. None of the bullets would strike Devon, but one of the bullets was to go, as if by accident, into the face of Keith, penetrating one of his eyes. If he did this, they had told him, he would be perfectly safe and have his revenge against MSKZ for what it had done to him. Murder. Keith's eyes were a cool grey-blue color. *Murder*. . . .

Mart Breden shut his own eyes tightly with a knot of terror that leaped together in his chest twisting intolerably. Then it was gone and he could breathe and his heart could beat again. With immeasurable relief he felt the gun fall from his fingers and heard it thud lightly on the floor. He opened his eyes, looking back at Yardly Devon, who stood across the room regarding him triumphantly, ready to shoot.

It had been a double catspaw. They had primed him so that he would do a murder for them, apparently by accident, and then never be able to reveal that it was a catspaw murder, or that he had been hypnoed—because he would be dead, killed by Yardly Devon, a paranoiac who had probably been easily set off in his direction by a few carefully keyed casual remarks. Devon made a handy killer, for he would kill with perfect innocence, convinced that his choice of time and place was his own, convinced that he had learned of Breden's whereabouts by accident and able to tell the police no more than that. He felt he ought to warn the others in the room.

"Mr. Devon's business is entirely with me," he said, leaning back against the filing cases and feeling the handles and knobs push against his back. Filing cases aren't comfortable to lean against, but there had been too many cross-currents of melodrama, and he was tired. "I think it is his contention that I am a diploid or a Martian or something. He has been trying to kill me." He added wearily, "If I have been irritable today you can blame it on that."

All the tiny normal motions of the people in the room had suddenly stopped, even the motion of breathing diminished. A madman with a smile and a shave and a gun full of bullets is not the

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person to bring confidence and relaxation. Devon said. "I had my detectives follow you. I told you that you couldn't get away."

Breden could feel the light weight of the curare pistol against his toe. It was supposed to be there to protect him, but it might as well have been on the moon for all the chance he would have to get it. He leaned against the filing cases, watching Devon's gun, wondering if a person could see the bullet flash out.

SOMEONE was stirring slightly in a stealthy movement. "He's a good shot," Breden warned quietly, remembering the creased neck in a shot from a moving cab. He looked into the dark hole of the muzzle. It was like a small dark eye that would expand to cover the world with darkness. His own voice seemed to come from a distance. "If I'm going to hell I don't want an escort. Just take it easy and hold still, and in a minute E-2 will stop complaining and giving you trouble and go back to being just another label on an egg compartment."

"But I *like Mart,*" said Zal plaintively after a moment. He stood up, a solid-shouldered nineteen-year-old in a defiantly gaudy pink sport shirt, carefully stuck his thumbs into his ears and wiggled his fingers at Devon. His *excessive* number of fingers. Breden saw it from the side of his vision as something fantastic but unimportant. At the center of focus he saw the most important thing in the universe, the automatic and the hand that held it jerk slightly, and then begin to waver in an arc. He wondered why Devon neither spoke nor fired.

"You're *all* Martians," wailed Devon.

That was when the tension broke. Everyone began to move rapidly at once, apparently all acting on the same simple impulse that Breden was acting on, that there was no profit in waiting for Devon to shoot them all down. The shots were too loud in that inclosed room. The sound had an impact like a succession of blows, distorting everthing.

Zal was clinging to Devon's gun arm, and then was on the floor on his hands and knees while the tall stout girl held the thrashing figure in a tight desperate clasp with his arms partially pinned, and the convulsively squeezing hand pumped shots into the floor.

Breden had instinctively circled out of the line of fire and come in from behind, his eyes ranging for the gun in the struggling tangle of heads and arms and hands. The convulsively squeezing hand began pulling the trigger randomly again, and the impact of the sound stung his ears and skin as he spotted it. He slapped at the deadly shiny thing with an open palm, and it suddenly thumped on the floor and skidded away. . . .

The tall stout girl picked it up and suddenly the room was quiet. Only Devon continued to struggle against the restraining arms.

She waved the gun in a sweeping hurried gesture, holding it by the barrel. "Everybody get out through the passage and close the door. Pick up the bottles and sandwich wrappings and take them along so it won't look like there was a crowd," she called, "Keith will take care of this madman."

The big blond man approached the group and locked on a wrestling grip as the others unpeeled from their struggling captive one by one and darted through the open door.

Zal had uncurled from his hands-and-knees position and rolled over on his side. There was a small pool of blood where he had crouched. They gave him hardly a glance as they passed him and crowded through the open catalogue rack, but Planck-Planck said, as he passed, "Take it easy Zal. Look out for those doctors. They'll get curious and claim they have to open you up and take out something—just for a look inside." The tall girl lagged behind last and handed the gun to Breden.

"Take over, boy," she called, her lips close to Breden's ear. Devon had wriggled free except for one wrist, and he was pulling and jerking at the end of his held arm like a hooked fish flopping on a

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line. His whimpers were rising to a keening wail, like a banshee warming up. The girl raised her voice. "Shut the door behind us and leave us out of the story." Sirens in the street and air outside were adding to the racket. She vanished through the door, and he closed the swinging rack hastily.

VIII

DEVON was still pulling away from Keith's placid grip on his wrist, jerking and shrieking thinly with every breath, apparently under the impression that the Martians were going to murder him. It was hard to think, like being in the same room with a fire siren, and the sound of feet pounding up the escalator and a whistle blowing on the sidewalk added to the din. Holding the gun turned in Devon's direction, Mart moved toward the door, and through it abruptly caught a glimpse of two policemen. He noticed that they had been wearing flesh colored pads over their noses and recognized their intention just as the first sudden startling noise of a fizz bullet sizzled past his face, but it was too late to stop the breath he was drawing and some of the gas went into his lungs.

There were three other sharp sizzling sounds. He saw Keith and Devon slow to a stop, just as his own desire to move faded. When Devon stopped screaming it left the air empty.

The gas-ice bullets had shattered against the walls and filing cabinets, and the shattered small pieces lay on the floor sizzling and dwindling into gas.

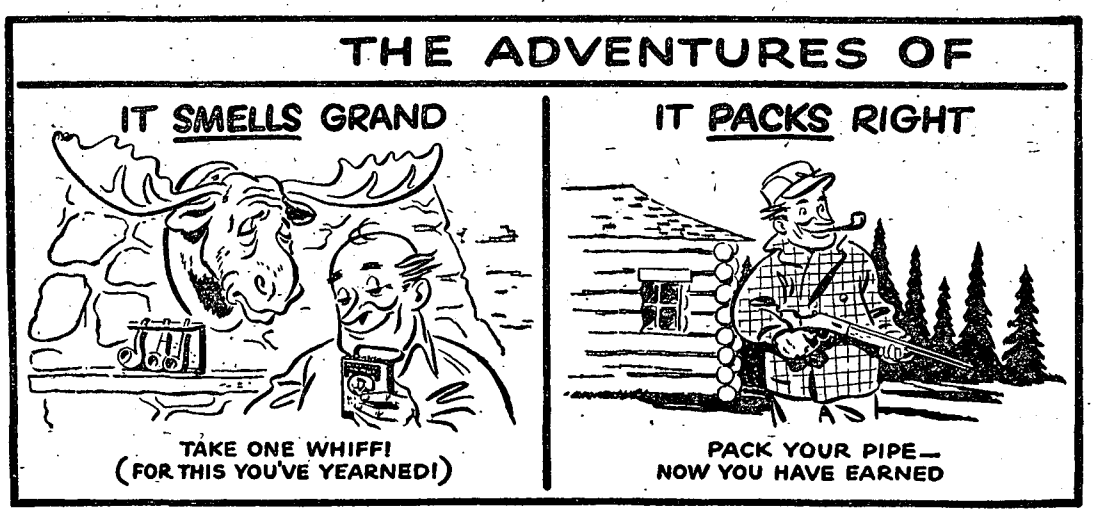
He felt like a cataleptic, perfectly able to think, but with no desire to move or speak. The fizz pistols shot some standard hypnotic suspended in a compressed gas-ice pellet.

The police waited a cautious minute and a half and then they stepped into the room. "You won't move or talk unless we ask you to," said the one in the uniform of a sergeant, speaking with slight difficulty because of his nose pad. He walked up to Breden and efficiently removed the gun from his hand, wrapped it in a handkerchief and dropped it in his pocket. The other one was busy at a desk opening out and arranging a sound recorder. He switched it on and stepped back. "Okay," he told the sergeant.

The sergeant turned his head and said matter-of-factly into the recorder, "These are preliminary questionings taken under hypnosis at the scene of the incident and do not constitute voluntary confessions unless later sworn to in free-will state, and a condition of sanity."

He turned to Breden and gestured at Zal on the floor. "Who's that?"

"Zalemeyer Elberg."



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"What's your name?"

"Paul Breden."

"Are you responsible for his injury?"

It was a debatable question. "Indirectly," he said, after hesitating.

The sergeant looked faintly annoyed. "Did you fire at him with intent to kill?"

"No."

"Did you fire at him accidentally?"

"No." There was some disadvantage in this method of questioning, for though he answered willingly, he felt no desire to save the man questions by explaining that he had not had the gun.

The sergeant belatedly put two and two together. "Who did the shooting?"

"Yardly Devon." Mart knew he could fight the drug and lie if he had to.

"With this gun?"

"Yes." So far no lies had been necessary.

"Point him out." The cop glanced at the other two. "Which is he?"

Breden pointed, and the cop followed his indication and addressed Devon, who stood passively, looking pathetic, his thin sandy hair rumpled, his overshirt ripped and his hat knocked off. "What's your name?"

"Yardly Evert Devon," answered Devon obediently, and the recorder took down the sound of his voice.

"Did you shoot this man?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"He was trying to get my automatic. I had to stop him."

"Why did you have a gun?"

"Because they are—I think they are Martians. "They call themselves—"

"Cuffs," said the sergeant. While the other was snapping cuffs on Devon's wrists he checked the time on his watch, unclipped a small mike from his belt and spoke into it. "Everything under control. Gas cleared. Send up a stretcher and the med for one gut wound and a violent case." He hung the mike on his belt again and walked over, switching off the recorder.

Breden found his powers of motion returning as the hypnotic wore off almost as suddenly as it had taken effect. A man came in with a five lens motion picture camera and began moving around with it in routine fashion.

"They're Martians," Devon stated suddenly as he recovered his ability to speak. "There were a lot more of them and they escaped before you got here."

The sergeant swung on Breden with his expression hardening. "How about that? You know that the people involved in a shooting have to stay around to be questioned. Did somebody leave?"

Here was the perfect moment to do what he had once intended, destroy MSKZ in a blast of publicity. The mo-

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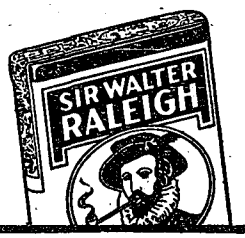

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ment was spectacular. The cameraman taking pictures, the wounded man on the floor, the doctor coming in the door accompanied by two attendants carrying a stretcher, the madman making strange accusations. . . .

All Breden had to do now to add the crowning touch of sinister fantasy was to walk over to the catalogue rack that concealed the hidden door and swing it open. After that he could make whatever accusations he chose, and they would be believed.

SUDDENLY Breden found that he no longer wanted to tell the police about the secret door. He had forgotten what his reasons had been for threatening it.

His lag in answering had been only an instant. "Nobody else was here," he lied.

The sergeant gave Devon a disgusted glance and nodded. "Okay. Do you two want to go down to the station with this Devon character now and make a statement of what happened? We'll give you a lift." He glanced at Zal's fingers as he was carried past on the stretcher, then spoke as if from some shadowy uncertainty, "I take it you two are related."

"Cousins."

"Yeah." The sergeant gave Devon another disgusted glance. "Let's go."

They went out and down the escalator, and behind them Devon pushed back against urging hands, his voice growing hysterical. "No you have to listen to me. Believe me, the Martians were here. They went out a secret door. It's behind that bookcase." His voice was pleading now. "You can't take me away without listening to me. At least look at the—" The policeman with him gave him an impatient shove to the head of the escalator. Devon clung to the side with manacled hands, his voice shrill.

"For the love of justice! Look at that bookcase! You can't . . . not without even. . . ." A rough shove dislodged him from the railing, and the screaming began again while the irritated young policeman held him still and the police doctor passed Keith and Breden, running up the moving escalator with a pacifying hypo in hand. It was the sound of terror.

"You can't—no, you're with them! You're with the Martians. They've hired you. I see it now. You're against me too. No don't. It's poison. Help!"

Behind them the shouting choked off to a mumble as the hypo took hold. The escalator delivered them, silent and pale, to street level. A crowd had assembled outside. Keith and Breden climbed into the waiting police patrol wing. . . .

After they had given their testimony and signed the record of their statements they paused on the station house steps, reluctant to separate.

"Quite a day!" Mart said.

"It was interesting enough," Keith agreed. He hesitated oddly. "If you don't mind my saying—I'm sorry about—ah—your troubles. E-2s weren't really meant to be birthed, but I can arrange that if you have children they shan't be like you—that is—"

"That they won't be *too much* like me anyhow?" Mart supplied the words, grinning.

"That's it." Keith shook hands with embarrased vigor as they parted. "Take care of yourself, Remember that you are my star line now."

"Thanks," Mart said, meaning it.

They walked away from each other, and it was a warm friendly summer night that seemed to Mart to be just for him.

When he stepped out of the elevator on his own floor Nadine flew into his arms. "Mart. Are you all right? I called everyplace and you weren't there. You weren't home—"

She was crying. He wrapped his arms around her comfortingly, and she tilted her face back from his shoulder to look at him, and everything was fine. It was wonderful, and he couldn't understand how he could ever have been unhappy. "Mart. . . . I wanted to tell you. We don't have to have children."

"Oh yes we do," he said firmly before kissing her. "And they'll all grow up to be President." He'd explain later.

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OASIS

By RALPH SLOAN

THE rocket slanted out of the brightness of space. . . .

Then tragedy struck. Some tiny cell forgot the current that made it live, or some fleck of dust drifted its Judas way into the spidery controls of the hurtling machine.

The rocket became a meteor flashing down at the desert world below.

Inside the rocket the air became too hot for the man to breathe. The thermo-

It took more than

one spaceman

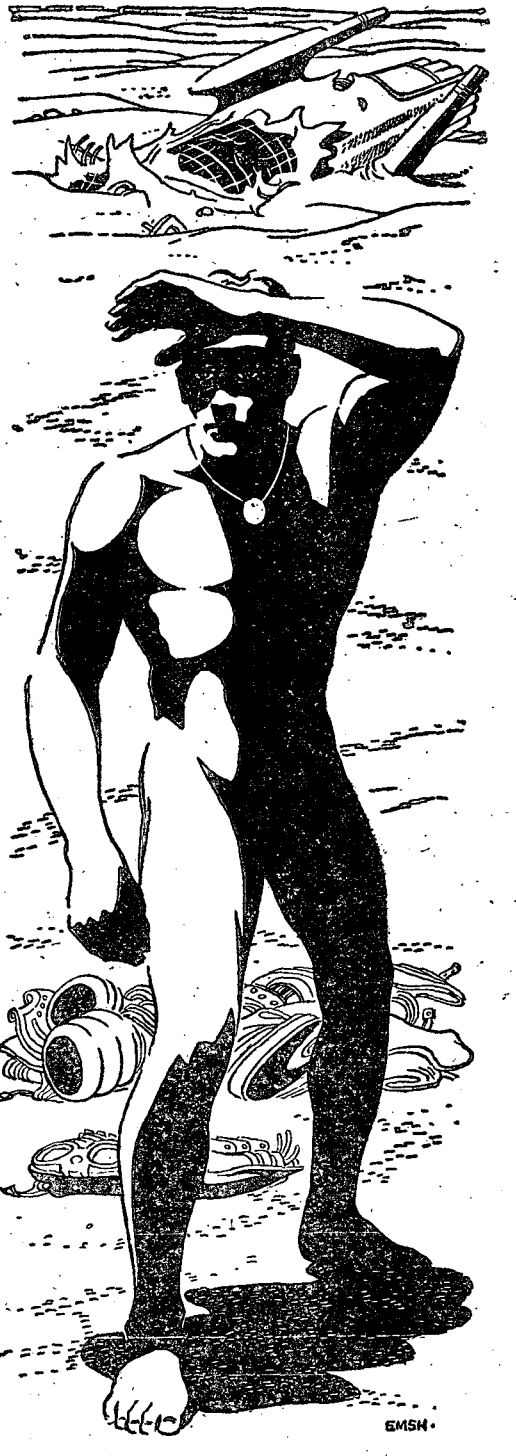
to outlast three suns

couplings of his armor closed and there was no more air. The controls were gone. He sat locked within his trusses, solitary in his armor; strapped and bound to the control chair by devices which guaranteed that even in death the corpse should not be lost.

The rocket struck. The outer hull shed like a waxen husk and the inner one smashed ahead, drives full on, boring, surfacing, ditching the hot wastelands; flashing in the reddened sun like a hooked marlin.

The final crash came and clouds of dobie dust sprang into the hot still air and mushroomed into the red sky.

The crackle of cooling metal spanked sharp across the sands. The metal fish was dead and the dust stalked through the gaping holes of its wreckage. The



He was fit to explore the stars

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dust curled up and floated in the shimmering heat. It drifted down in a silent red shroud, sifting through the cracks and piling on the jagged metal.

There was nothing but wreckage and the hot stillness of the three suns of Marcus glaring down on the withered world.

A lizard scuttled across the cracked ground. It trembled on a dune and watched with beady eyes; its neck lobes pulsing. Somewhere the thin flow of water sang in the relentless heat.

The dust settled. Deep in the wreckage thermo-couplings clicked hollowly. The man breathed. The man breathed a shallow breath of unconsciousness near death.

A second lizard joined the first. Everywhere was the heat and the unbroken rolling of red dunes; merciless heat and the piping song of flowing water.

The man's breath grew stronger. A piece of flak slipped from an armored knee and clattered on the twisted deck, and the lizards fled.

This was what it was like to crash, the man thought numbly. They had said it could happen at the schools. They said a rocket might die and a man might live. Might live—might live. A starman might live. A starman with his flat toughened cells might live. The thought roused him. He was bred for his task. He was fit to explore the stars as his father had been fit. One more tour and it would be home for him, and a farm in Vermont where the snow piled deep—

The armor clanked as he crawled from the wreckage. Then he stood erect and appraised the tortured wastes.

Nowhere was there a trace of shadow. Only the fierce heat beating down like a living force. . . .

THROUGH the thin slits in his armored headpiece his blue eyes took in the dazzling flame of Marcus II. His laugh was muffled by the steel helmet.

"I'm going to be glad to see you, Vogler," he grimaced. "Whenever you get here, I'm going to be damn glad."

But it would be a week before the Mother Ship came looking for him. A hundred and sixty-eight hours to stay alive on this inferno.

The armor came apart in pieces. It was proof against flash heat. But it would broil him in the prolonged desert sun. It clattered on the hot clay. The braces and wrappings of gauze curled into the dust.

Schulmeyer stood bronze and naked. He was medium high and wide of shoulder and deep of chest. There was an intelligent quickness to his face.

"One week," he said aloud. He turned the points of the compass. There was only the shallow roll of red dunes and the dance of the heat.

"No vegetation," he inventoried. But he could live without food for a week. The desire to live was strong in him. But he would have to have water.

The temperature was near 150 degrees. The sweat was beginning to run from his face. He made a conscious effort and the pores closed and the loss of moisture lessened.

Somewhere in the dusty dryness the song of water sang sweetly.

There was no wind, but the dust was drifting. Schulmeyer watched it flowing through the wreckage. It was a small rocket for primary classification of a planet. Earth was always searching—always looking for life in the loneliness of space. Never finding it. . . .

The wreckage would soon be another dune. But the Mother Ship could still trace its isotopes.

Schulmeyer laughed harshly at it. He paid a mocking salute to the wreck.

"Cheers," he said. Then he struck off in search of the singing water; his silver identification tag bouncing against his bare chest.

At the crest of the third dune, he turned and squinted back at his foot prints. The drifting, burning dust had already filled the scars the crash had gouged in the barren wastes.

"Seven days . . . ." he whispered to himself.

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There was an uneasiness in him as he moved on. He had touched upon countless planets during his years of Starman duty; yet none had been so lonely—so ugly in its sun drenched loneliness.

The sun seemed to swell and beat against his flesh.

He found the spring babbling out of a crack in a dune. It was bordered by a pale yellow vine with conical buds like new ivy leaves before they spread flat to the sun; and the water sped a few feet across the red clay and then sank into the burning floor of the desert.

As he approached it, his eyes caught the quick movement of lizards darting away across the baked sands.

He felt the heat beating at his neck and scorching the cropped blond hair of his head. Dust drifted hot across his feet.

Never in his life had he seen anything so beautiful. So incredible. A tiny oasis huddled in the hollow of the dunes where the sun tore angry fingers at the searing air.

But it was wrong. The warning was acute and sharp. Not one spiral of moisture lifted toward the cloudless sky with all that ghastly shriveling heat wringing the air.

Schulmeyer stood in his own nakedness and watched the sparkling glitter of the spring dance in the red sun. The vermilion soil around the vine was delicately turned as though by tiny spades, and the spring bubbled cold and clear. There was the sweet scent of fresh water in the roasting air.

His thirst became a hideous demon in him and the singing water was a mad violin shrilling in his ear—

"No!" The sound of his own voice rasped upon his ear; jarring his senses.

He tore his eyes from the lure of water.

"Careful, careful," he told himself tremulously. He felt the urgency of instinct beating back against his thirst.

ONE week to live out in this blazing hell. And there must be water to live in a world of fiendish heat—a world where night was unknown and shade was a lusting dream.

The spring looked like water and it sang like water. But he'd seen a hundred devils on a hundred planets.

If only the dust would be still. . . .

Then he laughed.

"Have a little patience, ol' boy," he chided himself.

The wonderful devices of the rocket were dead and there was only his nakedness, and his silver name tag and his sharpness of mind to keep him alive. His years of training and exploring in the wildness of the stars had proofed him against so deadly an impulse as slaking his thirst in a poisonous spring that might water the devil's garden—might be more than just water.

He sat with his bare flesh against a dune and stared at the cool effervescence of gurgling water. He waited for the lizards.

The sun of Marcus II glowered mercilessly upon the baked desert. Everywhere the ground was the same; low sand dunes and valleys of hard red dobie, spiderwebbed with fine lacy cracks of dehydration. Across the undulating firmity a powdery red dust drifted. Always drifting remorselessly. Drifting without a stir of wind to propel it. Schulmeyer let a handful of it sift between his fingers. It was hot and dead. Utterly dead and sterile. And yet it drifted.

With little puffs of dust from their clawlike feet, the lizards returned. One came. Then two. Three. . . .

Across the cold, gurgling spring they crouched on the burning incline of the red dune, watching him with gimlet eyes and their throat lobes pulsing.

Schulmeyer sat motionless with an aching thirst.

Then the lizards broke. They dashed a few feet away. They scurried back in erratic little charges; charging toward the vines and the cool rush of water. Then, having provoked him enough, they ignored his vigil and crawled among the yellowish vines. They nibbled at the tender shoots and two scrambled to the

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edge of the spring and pushed their scaley snouts into the dancing water.

Schulmeyer breathed deeply; carefully. But he didn't move, except to run his hot tongue over his dry lips. He stared at the tinkling rush of water and remembered a cold mountain stream in Vermont with the snow nestling down the bank; a farmhouse across the knoll and a setter rolling in the drifts and shaking the snow from its russet coat.

The lizards ate and drank and frolicked through the low-cropped vegetation. Then what he had waited for happened. One detached itself from the others and skirted the spring. It stood with its snout lifted in the dry air, its violet eyes glaring up at him.

Schulmeyer didn't move. He tightened his control against sweating and his eyeballs rolled up toward the flaming burn of Marcus II.

Suddenly the lizard made a dash at him. Then it veered off with its tiny claws scrambling at the dust, and scurried around the dune.

Still Schulmeyer didn't move, and the other lizards watched stiffly tense from across the spring.

In a moment the curious one was back. This time it came slowly in circuitous dashes. Finally it crouched in the man's shadow, its long tail writhing in the fine red dust.

Then Schulmeyer moved. Like striking lightning his hand stabbed down and he pinioned the lizard's head between his thumb and forefinger. And with a flashing move he tore the head from the little monster and threw it in the dust where the lips curled and the jaws gaped.

The other lizards raced frantically across the eternal roll of dunes, through the soundless throb of heat, and their piping bird-like cries were the first animal sounds to break the desert still.

Schulmeyer's hands worked in feverish haste that sacrificed nothing to thoroughness. With his bare nails he ripped apart the flopping body, examining each organ with a practiced, cataloguing eye. This was for life. The grim law of survival drove him on. He had to live.

WHEN he finally threw the limp carcass from him there was satisfaction in his eyes. The lizard was an Earth prototype. Its water should be his water. Beyond that, the risk was unavoidable.

He wiped his sticky hands on his bare flanks and grinned as he approached the spring. He had never seen such cool, beautiful water. Little puffs of red dust from his footsteps preceded him and settled on the surface of the water. Caught in the splashing current, the dust rolled into tiny threads and drifted the short concourse.

Like a woman's hair, Schulmeyer thought. How like a woman's hair. Red hair blowing in the fall wind breasting the top of the hill; autumn leaves scattering like wee birds rustling in the breeze.

Then Schulmeyer laughed and dropped to his knees. He leaned forward and plunged his scorched arms into the cold water. . . .

Nothing!

There was nothing!

The clay was hot and burning to the flesh . . . .

"Where . . . ." The word tore from his parched throat.

He stared down at his fists struck against the clay bottom of the spring. Not one drop of water had touched his feverish flesh. Not a dot of moisture had cooled his burning nakedness.

The bubbling rush of the spring curled around his arms and left them sterile in whirlpools of dryness. In disbelief he slashed his arm through the surge of the spring and the water swirled back from his flesh. There was no contact. Nothing.

Schulmeyer rocked back on his heels and wiped the dryness of his hand across his dry face.

No. No, this couldn't be right. His brilliant mind raced and calculated; thousands of planet reports; facts flew through his brain. And they ended with an angry summation.

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He didn't know.

Then the humor struck him and he sat back on the red dust and laughed, his blue eyes mocking the spring.

"I'm cast out of Eden," he laughed.

Then the humor died and he stared at the cool rush of water and his tongue felt thick and swollen. His fingers tore at a crack in the dobie and he tossed a broken clod into the dancing heat. It splashed in the spring with a cold tinkle and droplets sprayed out in the hot air and hung like sparkling jewels in the red sun. Where the drops fell there was a dark stain in the red dust.

But none fell on Schulmeyer. With the accuracy of a knife thrower the spray targeted the lines of his body and left him untouched. Left his body crawling with the red dust and afire with the horrible branding flame of the consuming sun.

"No good to lick your lips," he whispered. "Get up. Think."

The dunes stretched infinitely. They were like a mirror repeating itself and he wondered if the hellishness of the cold spring was also repeated over and over in a nightmare of impossible salvation.

The heat had shriveled his lips and the drifting dust covered his body.

Marcus II burned relentlessly down through the cloudless red sky and his was the only shadow cast on this desert world. And no relief lay beyond the scorched horizon. This infernal world was the hub of an unholy trinity. Should he reach the horizon the angry ball of Marcus I would greet him. On and on through the wasteland,-and Marcus III would test its flaming lances against his dry cracking flesh.

NO ESCAPE. He desperately looked back the way he had come. Only his sense of direction dictated which way he had come through the blazing sea of desert. The red dust had drifted across the footprints and filled the scars of the crash. Instinct told him the rocket lay under that dune. Or that . . . or which. . . .

"Take hold of yourself," he cried. Thick words. He slumped down on the dune and vacantly faced the water. The water that glistened and sang like a Vermont freshet and carried the dust like a woman's hair.

"This is the last trip," he said. He looked up at the scorching sun. "After this one I'll mate and take a farm like my father's with snow on the ground and trees that drip maple syrup."

He shook his head and the dust crawled in the corner of his eyes. His mind went back through the years. . . .

"Every problem was created with a solution," he quoted slowly from the study tapes. "Man must solve the universe to know peace."

Even with a conscious control of his pores he could feel moisture escaping his body.

In the whole of the world there was only himself and the spring and the lizards and the vine. The lizards drank. And the vine sucked the water up in its fine yellow stems.

And there was that sun. That damn roasting sun cooking the flesh from his bones.

In a hysterical rage, he thought of tearing clods of dobie from the desert floor and trying to kill the savage beast that snarled down at him.

Then his blue eyes cleared and his chest heaved in great breaths of the dry air.

But he had to live!

The thought crept into his mind with thirst-driven cunning.

If there were no firsthand water for him, then he would take it however he could. He tore a fistful of vines from the bank of the spring, and before he could get them to his dry mouth they withered to brown straw.

The vine died at his touch.

Schulmeyer looked to the red heavens. He staggered to his feet and his young body shook with the ague of thirst.

"Where are you, Vogler?" he shouted.

His eyes searched the dunes. There

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were the lizards. Yes, always there were the lizards; peeking at him from around the dunes, scurrying over the drifting dust. He crouched back on the hot ground and waited.

They were a long time in coming. The drifting dust had covered the dead carcass and he was glad for that. But still they were more wary than before. He sat staring at the heat waves bouncing off the babbling spring.

Was it hours? Was it days? There was no time. Only the burning sun and the living thirst that clotted the tongue and dried the spittle.

The lizards drank. They drank gluttonously and he watched them in a hell of envy. He watched the lobes of their throats fill and stand hard when they were through.

He sat and shriveled in the angry burn of the sun while they played. Then fianlly one again ventured within the nearness of his shadow.

Schulmeyer was slower as he grasped this one. He was deliberate and careful. But the thought pounded at him that this thing had water. Swollen globules of water in its throat. The thing gave off piping screams and Schulmeyer's teeth tore into the sack.

Warm, life giving water sprang across his tongue!

IN THE same instant he felt the lizard's teeth rake his wrist and the water began to seethe and his mouth became a flooded, scalding cauldron. He threw the lizard to the desert floor and boiling water poured from his mouth. In the roar of pain he lost control of his body and his nakedness was suddenly drenched with sweat that oozed through the red dust and left a sheathing of clay as it was sucked up toward the red sun.

There was no stealing the water. The planet was casting him out. It would have nothing to do with him. He withdrew to the nearest dune and fell there. But his eyes couldn't leave the singing water.

How long had he been here? One day? Two? If only the sun moved. Or a cloud would drift by.

He hadn't realized unconsciousness had overtaken him until he was aware of rousing to the feeling of suffocation. His eyes opened, and it was a stifling world of red dust. The dust was creeping in his mouth and pouring down his nostrils. He sat up in panic and clawed at the orifices. The piles of dust that had built a mound over his head seemed to slip together and drift across the desert.

"Mustn't sleep again," he choked desperately.

Nothing moved. As far as the eye could see, nothing moved. Nothing but the cool, tantalizing splash of clear water. Clear water running in little rills; dancing in the hot sun.

His eyes ferreted over the cool ripples in the spring. He tried to wet his lips again. But it was no use.

Symbiosis!

Total symbiosis. His brain was appalled. But there could be no other conclusion. A closed circuit world. The spring fed the vine and the vine fed the lizards and claws of the lizards tended the vine. The place of the drifting dust was unfathomable. But it must be so. There was no other answer.

"One identity," he mouthed through the dust. "One hellish whole."

He looked at the lizard on the bank of the spring.

"You don't know humans," he shouted. "I'll outlast you. We were born to win."

Schulmeyer sat with his hands tucked in his armpits; his legs folded under him, exposing as little flesh as possible to the sun.

He sat and waited.

How many days were there left to wait? How many hours in eternity?

The sun never went down. There was no counting the time. He began counting numbers to reckon the passage of minutes.

The lizards lined the spring and crouched on their tails staring at him with their violet eyes. After a while he

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became conscious of having forgotten to count and he found himself staring trancelike at the babbling, foolish passage of water.

A closed circuit world! They didn't need him. He had nothing to give this burning world but his bones.

More lizards came until the banks were choked with them. They've come to watch me die, Schulmeyer thought. But Schulmeyer thought of the cool hills of Vermont, and he was stubborn.

He knew he had lost consciousness several times before he realized what was happening. The crawling, slithering sound of many bodies came to him. Thin piping cries overrode the song of the spring and when he looked he saw the lizards piled deep in the cool darkness of his shadow and dozens more struggling to climb the squirming mound.

Anger charged through him. These devils' children would not know the coolness so long as he burned.

He raised his fist in a fury to break bodies and send lizards fleeing and screaming across the desert.

Then he saw the spring!

He saw the spring and he didn't believe. A tendril of water was slipping over the bank and flowing through the red dust toward him.

Shade! The thought sang through his whole water starved being. It was the one thing this desert cried for. What lunacy! Dry tears came to his eyes. The self-useless shade of his naked body was the one thing he had to offer against the flaming heat.

He threw back his head and laughed as the first trickle of cool water swelled around his burning feet. The hellish world had taken him in. He was part of the closed corporation, employed.

Cold, rippling water in the heathen sun. It slipped up his body and capered on the hairs of his legs. It soothed the groin and balmed the burning shoulders until his skin trembled in ecstasy and his whole body shook as the droplets climbed the dust of his chin and ran over the swollen tongue.

The rolling wastes and the heat waves meant nothing. The spring sang in his ears. He was going to live!

THE rocket slanted out of the brightness of space. . . .

For long minutes the Mother Ship circled the barrens and then finally landed where its delicate instruments indicated the fallen rocket lay. The port opened and four men came out dressed in the white shorts of shipboard uniform.

The dust drifted and the sun burned them. But they tightened their pores only slightly. So long as the Mother Ship lived there would be water for them. Vogler pointed to a red dune like the rest. "That's it," he said. He lifted an instrument and the dust boiled and the wreck began to show out of the desert floor.

One of the men crawled into the wreck.

"He's not here," Cordoba called.

"Then he didn't die in the crash," Vogler said thankfully. He moved a few feet, the dust rising in little puffs from his shod feet. "Here's his armor."

"Then he's alive," one of the men said.

Vogler didn't answer. He watched a lizard crouched on a dune and wiped the sweat from his square face. It mixed with the film of dust that drifted.

"I think I hear water," Cordoba said.

They walked across the red dunes. They found the spring.

Hundreds of lizards saw them and raced screaming across the burning dunes, away from the thing that gave shade.

There was a deathly whiteness in the faces of the men. "I don't see him," Vogler said violently.

There was silence. They stood and turned their backs to the bronze thing on the side of the dune. A trickle of water irrigated its base and the trunk was bent to give the greatest shade. Two limbs, hideous and leafless, sprouted from the burned scaly trunk.

"He must have wandered away," Vogler said. His voice shook.

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"Yes," Cordoba nodded restlessly. "He must have wandered away."

The men stood like statues looking over the dancing heat. They knew. Silently they each knew.

One by one they walked to the bronze thing. They hardly looked with their eyes. They turned the metal tag between their fingers. The spring sang sweet and cool in the hot still air.

Vogler was the last to go. When he returned the tag was in his fist and the chain dangled broken.

"He must have wandered off," he said.

"Yes," one of the men echoed.

Vogler's face quivered suddenly. He whirled in anger and his fist shot in the direction of the thing by the spring.

"That's an ugly tree," he shouted.

The others nodded, not knowing what to say.

"I once saw a stump like it in Vermont," Cordoba said slowly. "It was a maple tree that had burned."

They walked back across the dunes and the drifting dust toward the Mother Ship. "He must have wandered off," Vogler repeated suddenly.

"Yes," Cordoba said. He was thinking that this was his last trip and he would be allowed to mate and return to the lush jungles of his Amazon and never see this hideous planet again.

Vogler was the last to pass from the relentless heat into the port of the Mother Ship. He turned and looked back; his eyes reddened. The sound of water gurgled across the desert.

"That's an ugly tree," he grated. He had known it like a brother. "That's the ugliest thing I've ever seen."

He suddenly lifted his gun and the red dust boiled and the dunes melted and the singing water died. There was a great levelness in the desert like a sign of peace.

The dust began to drift to cover the wound.

Vogler's eyes were focussed stiffly ahead as he walked into the rocket. ●

THE READER SPEAKS

(Continued from page 6)

apsurge of sheer quality in the field so noticeable in the past decade. And in the long run, quality will win. It always has, sooner or later. Classics are classics only because the great majority of the people accept them as such. A classic is by definition a good commercial property.

Increased quality is inescapable in s-f because of the great difficulty today's s-f author has in competing with science. The population is getting lousy with experts, and increasingly one finds oneself hanging entire plot sequences on apparently logical projections of science which the experts noisily laugh off just at press time. This is the biggest single reason for the increase in sociological, psychological, and comparative-ecological stories. But these call for thinking—honest-to-God, deep-digging, far-reaching, *original* thinking. And that's got to mean quality.

At the luncheon, Sam Mines took quite a drubbing for the BEM covers (there, too, was Bixby but unbowed). That bothered me some. Perhaps once these covers were titillative. Perhaps they did seduce certain unsophisticated frustratees with shiny quarters into believing that these magazines were handbooks for The Better Orgy. But those days are long since. All distaff exposure on a publication amounts to nowadays is a stamp of respectability. Even Plato's "Republic" has cleavage on the cover. (Who was it called books "breast sellers"?) At a very early age those of us who were genuinely morbid in our literary thirsts discovered that it was the dull black cover that was most likely to conceal von Sacher-Masoch and the erudite Ivan Bloch, and not the polychromatic peepshows of the pulps.

Just one more thing: At all such résumés of science fiction, homage gets paid to Gernsback, Campbell and Gold. I don't want to take one whit—not even an iota, which I suspect is smaller—from the honor due these giants in the field. But I feel it's high time someone made a large noise about an event in the field as important to it as Campbell's nova-stories or even Gold's cover-layout: an event that contributed as much to the growth of science fiction (comparatively) as Gernsback's second year of AMAZING. And that is the issue of TWS in which Sam Merwin published one of his current fan letters, labelled

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it a horrible example, and said in effect "This, by all the gods of space and time, is the end, chillun, and you may consider Sergeant Saturn a dead duck." It took courage to do that, and it was done well. Like I said: Quality will win out, and if you have real thinking you're going to have quality.

First Sam, then the fans, found out that it just didn't take any thinking to speak of to get cute about a jug of Xeno. With that historic act, Sam caused a fine and growing segment of the readership to throw away its teething ring. There are lots of good things about Merwin, but that one thing alone is enough to put him up there with the other big boys.

—Ted Sturgeon

LETTERS FROM OUR READERS

It's time for letters, now—so let's tear ourselves away from Ted Sturgeon's interesting editorial chat and get on with the readers' reactions to our previous issues. Here goes.

VICE AND VERSA
by Walter Scott

Dear Sir: Would you mind if a guy from this distant part of the World poked his nose into your affairs just to say a few words? No, I don't think you would in the least, as after all it will only be one more letter to add to the pile or to fill the waste-paper basket.

I wouldn't want to say that I am the only subscriber to TWS, SS and FSM from Brazil, though it does look like it since I've noticed that apparently the major part of letters published in your section are from the United States itself.

And I am not writing to criticize or complain about the yarns that I have been reading for over three years, though sometimes I have felt like doing so. But in a certain way I have refrained from it as I realize that likings are not all the same. In many instances the stories are very good, in my opinion, whereas in others they are disgusting. But what's the use in the long run? I've read comments from people that write to you praising this and that story that seem to me to be real "washouts" and vice-versa. So what?

However, I've just finished reading NO LAND OF NOD in the December 1952 issue of *Thrilling Wonder Stories* and I thought I'd creep out of my silence and let you know my say-so about it. I want to congratulate both you and the author Sherwood Springer for the splendid piece of work. Never have I come across such a wonderful statement. The story is terrific if one looks at it from the right angle. And everybody should. What realism and what a great lesson it bears. And how simple and clear it is told to readers. Those remarks of yours under the heading "AS IT WAS" about "the story that couldn't be printed" is certainly a "slap on the face" of the so-called puritans. If Humanity had been taught about Adam and Eve maybe things nowadays would have been different, though in passing I might add that I for one never did accept the Adam & Eve version of Creation which I think is the biggest joke played on MEN and is nothing more than FAKE.

I certainly don't want to go on writing and writing and having you waste a lot of space. But I could not refrain from sending you this note on this very special occasion and I trust you'll find a corner in your magazine wherein this letter might be printed, if the printing should be worth while.

Of course my English may not be so good to justify the printing, but as a native of Brazil I have difficulties in mastering other people's language.

Mighty glad for your kind attention and believe me I won't be pestering you unless I get shaky about some other yarn as NO LAND OF NOD.—*Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, South America.*

NO LAND OF NOD produced some excited reaction in many quarters—it also produced some surprisingly apathetic remarks. Nobody called us to task for printing it, however, which was a surprise in itself. That we expected.

GOSH WOW
by Dick Clarkson

Dear Sam—As far as the December ish of TWS goes, I have but one thing to say—no, this time 'tis not "crud" . . . . 'tis (hold everything) Goshwowgollygeewhizoboyoboyoboy! Stolen most foully from Gregg Calkins (Oops! Unmentionable name), but quite apropos. 'Twas really great. And trimmed edges coming up, you say!

Crossen was at his normal best . . . . never did see how one guy can wring so much humor out of so few words. Howsomever, 'twas a li'l bit disappointing that he hadda go and marry off Draco, after all this time said worthy has managed to hold on to his precious batchelorhood. Oh, well . . . . we all have to go sometime.

Jones was good, and it was a completely new Hamilton from any I ever saw. And much better. And I'm not even done yet! Nope, two out of your four short stories were actually *good*! Normally, I'm lucky to find one good one in two ishes; this time 'twas the other way about. Goshwowgol . . . . I said that before. Yes. Fout!.

May I stick in a plug, Sam? No, 'tis not the usual type. I would like to bring two things to the attention of fandom: one is the fact that Theocrastus Q. Galileo is definitely still among the living, and, two, a letter here which I have from him announces his latest invention: *crudcillin*. He asks me to bring this revolutionary discovery to the attention of all fans everywhere, since its main ingredient is chlorophyllized, ammoniated lanolin. That is guaranteed to cure *whatever* ails you, from your headbone to your feets. I would never have thought to put this fact in, except for the fact that you had a perfect buildup to it in your editorial. And, remember; it's guaranteed not to rip, tear, nor ravel down the back and comes complete with hot and cold folding doors. Thanx, Sam.

Heard from Moskowitz yet re MAJOR VENTURE? Or has the bomb exploded by now? I'm glad that I didn't give my address when Craig wrote that letter, or I'd have a bomb, too. Hey, What am I saying? Oh, well . . . . you have ceased

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to print the letters of my nom de plume, and 'tis by now common knowledge. However, I have to hope now that Hank has cooled off, or I'll still get a bomb.

I better shut up . . . . I've said too much arreddy. Lemme repeat that I thought thish of TWS really the best in half an eon, and for Ghu's sake, keep it up! Seeya next ish.—*Harvard U, Lionel B-12, Cambridge 38, Mass.*

Trimmed edges commenced on SS for February, 1952, as you have doubtless had occasion to observe. We didn't promise them for TWS, having not made up our minds yet. This being a progressive age, we'd like to see advance and change but we want to know where we're going before we go. Would like to see the letter Gregg Calkins writes you when he sees what you've done to his unmentionable style.

FLATTERY

by Burnice F. Love

Dear Mr. Mines: It isn't my usual policy to write letters to magazines, but I feel that this is an excepion. The December issue of Thrilling Wonder Stories was absolutely outstanding! TWS has long been one of my favorites in the field of Science Fiction, and I never fail to enjoy it—but this last issue was sheer perfection!

"CANTERBURY APRIL" is one of the most wonderful pieces of writing it has been my good fortune to read in quite some time. Let's have more of Raymond F. Jones—and more, and more, and more. . . . . "NO LAND OF NOD" was really superb. Very realistic. As for "WHAT'S IT LIKE OUT THERE?" I feel that this is one of the most believable narratives of space travel I have seen. Mr. Hamilton is certainly improving!

I think that "THE CAPHIAN CAPER" was the best of Kendell Foster Crossen's series about Manning Draco, though they were all good reading material. "THE SIGN OF HOMO SAP," LESSON IN SURVIVAL," and "PARADOX PLANET" were all enjoyable stories, but didn't quite measure up to the standards set by the others.

All in all, I was so pleased with this issue, after I had read it, that I bought copies of it for several friends in England. So you can see that it is going to be a very widely read issue.

While I am commenting on this issue. I'd like to put in a word or two for my favorite illustrator—Virgil Finlay. As far as I am concerned, no issue is complete without at least one Finlay illustration, and if there happen to be more than one, oh joy! This lad is the best in the field, so let's keep him coming back for encores!

I guess that about covers the current issue, and now I have a favor to ask: I would deeply appreciate it if some kind reader could send me issues of TWS prior to 1950, as that is when I started reading the mag, and I should like very much to add as many as possible of the older issues to my collection.

Well, I guess that's it for this time. Yours for bigger & better TWS,—*900 East Boise Ave., Boise, Idaho.*

Sheer perfection is probably an understatement, but we'll go along with you on the idea that there were two outstanding stories in the issue. And you actually bought extra copies to send to friends in England. . ? Greater love hath no fan. . . .

CLAWS OF CARBALLOY

by Anthony K. van Riper

Dear Sam: Grrr! You edit too dam many stf magazines! How in the name of anything at all is a guy supposed to keep his head above water, let alone get any work done? And they're all so good, too. Most of the time, that is.

First off, the cover. Let me herewith sincerely saw that it is about the best cover that I have ever seen gracing the head end of one of your group. There is only one man whom I would rather have seen out front and that's Chesley Bonestell. Any hope in that direction? Anyway, keep up the good work and let's have more, much more, of the redoubtable Coggins.

As to the stories: THE VIRGIN OF ZESH is the best thing DeCamp has ever done about Krishna, in a way, it's about the best thing he's ever done. (I will except his Pratt collaborations, since they're straight fantasy, and he'll never be any better than he was in LEST DARKNESS FALL, but otherwise. . .) Now to carp a bit. I suppose I am overly bright, but it seemed obvious to me that Althea would fall in love with and marry Yuruzh, and the story would have been improved if either a) it were sprung more out of the clear blue on the reader, or b) if it were built up gradually . . . the way I would have liked to have seen it done.

Dissertation department: If it never does anything else, the publication of THE LOVERS has enlarged the scope of stf immeasurably. I could notice the influence here in THE VIRGIN . . . a year ago, such an ending, such a mating of alien races would have brought forth screams of anguish from all corners of the globe. But now . . . although the screams will still issue forth, I am afraid, the thinking stf reader will accept the marriage as the only possible ending (other than Althea going into solitude: ". . . get thee to a nunnery; to a nunnery, go!") and go on from there, nor will they allow it to spoil the enjoyment of a well-written and well-handled story. Which brings me to another point which I should like to make:

First, let me categorically state that any religion that enters into the following statement is purely coincidental. Now.

It seems to me that what seems to trouble most of the protesting readers who wail and weep about this that and the other thing is not any difference of religious belief, or non-belief, but rather a difference in their way of looking at the *mores* of the time. Naturally, it is a normal thing to regard all other times and races, and creeds in the light of our own present-day thoughts, but, in science-fiction, that is exactly what the intelligent reader cannot afford to do. The average reader of science-fiction today can accept such differences from the norm as masculine nail-tinting and sidearms (Heinlein: *Beyond This Horizon)* but most of them will immediately wail if the author attempts to put the heroine in bed with the hero simply because she wants to be there. It is

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inconceivable that sexual *mores* will undergo no changes over the next centuries . . . either to progress or to retrogress . . . one way or the other there will be some change. There was a day, you know, when concubines were all the rage, and it was no disgrace to be someone's bastard son, although the consequences were not all they might have been at times. Conversely, there have been times when morality was even stricter than it is now, and who am I to say which way the balance will fall in the future? I will say, however, that there will be some change, and one might as well get used to it. But not only will there be changes in sex, there will undoubtedly be changes in religious beliefs, present hierarchies notwithstanding. You will note that Smith has his characters swearing "By Klono's brazen claws . . . tungsten teeth . . . carballoy claws . . . etc." So what? So someone may many years from now find there isn't any God, or they may prove there is, beyond any shadow of any kind of doubt; meanwhile, let us not say that because an author has his characters do something that is not moral according to our present day moral standards he is utterly and irretrievably wrong . . . many people have done so, and will, I am afraid, continue to do so, but they shouldn't.

In a science-fiction story, and particularly there, the author should be allowed the widest latitude in setting up the bases of his story, and it should not be the reader's task to tear down, but rather to accept them and go on from there.

I'll bet large sums that someone will write you and say, at least approximately, ". . . how could you be so vulgar as to permit such a story (THE VIRGIN OF ZESH) to be printed in your magazine? I will not permit my son (substitute father, brother, or whatever) to read such filth! The very idea! A sweet young girl being actually whipped, and taking off her clothes in front of *men*, and then actually *marrying* a . . . a . . . a BEAST! A thing with a tail! Why God never would permit . . . it's appalling . . . you should be banned . . ." Oh, what the hell . . . I could go on like that forever, Sam, but you get the idea, I guess. De Camp has set up his precepts, and the reader should stick by them, sink or swim. If he sinks, that's the author's fault, not the reader's, UNLESS he brings in a few outside influences to destroy the author's concept of his story's setting and background.

But by and large, one should remember, *"autre temps, autre mores"* or words to that effect. I'm afraid I'm a bit of an amoralist, myself, but after just so much of ". . . it just isn't done. . ." I thank God that some few people have had the courage to go ahead and do it anyway. I doubt I'll ever do much myself, but at least, by hell, I reserve the right to do whatever I want, so long as my own conscience is clear, and I hurt no one else in the process. Consequently, I can accept almost any premise that an author brings forth, and can go on from there enjoying the story he has written. I have only one basis for reading your magazine, and that's to enjoy the stories and to let my imagination go to work on the concepts they present.

I seem to have rattled on at great length, when all this simply is a defense, premature and unnecessary, I hope, of THE VIRGIN OF ZESH and THE LOVERS, and the raft of good stories that I hope will follow. I would be interested to hear from you,

[*Turn page*]

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if only by postcard, if anyone did write in along the lines I outlined above.

To the other yarns, briefly: All good except for THE UNRELIABLE PERFUMIST, which was flimsy, at the very best. DARK NUPTIAL was a little too pat, though the middle third was swell. STAR OF WONDER was the second-best story in the issue, with the Crossen novelet a close third. It suffered, I think by being in the same issue with De Camp. Let's have more of Laertes Solomon, if you please! Also, I think the further trials of Althea and Yuruzh could stand airing, if you can talk DeCamp into it.

I liked the letters of Zillah Kendall (I will not say how Zillah can you get, tho' I'm tempted. . .) and Jim Harmon. I will take issue with Farnham, if only to state that the man never lived, bishop, layman, or Christ himself who has not sworn at one time and another. For the love of space, anybody, don't tell me that Christ never swore in the Bible. . . I know he didn't. But hyperbole aside, the man who, let us say, drops a ten pound hammer on his toes is not going to rise up in wrath crying "oh PSHAW!" That's too silly for words, and any author who wrote a scene like that would be laughed off the earth.

Orchids to D'Imperio for a very scholarly letter which I appreciated, and to John Brunner, although I disagreed with some of what he had to say, I liked the way he said it. I expected footnotes, yet. Ed Coley's note (?) is an example of what I was trying to get across, in a backhanded sort of way. Why shouldn't there arise a situation where a frustrated female tries to create her ideal and then (as Mark Twain would have put it) gets left? You have to accept the fact of survival kits in the first place, after that, the rest comes easily . . . such a situation *could* happen, and if it happens to be immoral according to someone-or-other, so what? A couple of centuries from now it could be, and might be, quite moral.

To Barbara Yoacham: Who wants to see plunging necklines on a male? Or on most females, for that matter?

To Dick Clárkson: ¿No es posible, señor, que los hombres, en un momento de anxiedad, *estuviesen* hablar en lengua que no es próprio en punto? A veces, yo he hecho el mismo errór también. Y Usted, hombre? That is to say, I agree with Señor West.

To Moskowitz: The secret is out at last! Every author whose by-line you read in stf is one man, and one alone. His name? HENRY KUTTNER! Satisfied?

To Mines: By now, you have no doubt circularly filed my letter to FSM, so, I say again, orchids to SPS.—*1402 Beacon St., Brookline, Mass.*

No editor would be human (quiet! we'll argue about that some other time) if he didn't heave a sigh of pure joy every time he gets a letter like this. Why be funny if the readers will do it for him?

As to the VIRGIN OF ZESH—you will find other letters along the way leaping upon it with hob-nailed boots. We'll own up right now that we bought it for one reason only—it was such darn good fun. If that be treason. . . .

You have a good point, we think, in saying that the science fiction reader *cannot* judge the stories from today's viewpoint—this is exactly the fallacy in some of the outraged criticisms of provocative themes. You mind if we quote you some time? *Autre temps, autre mores* should be the motto of every stf magazine. And if you want a good sample of that, have a look below at. . .

TABOOS NEED BREAKING

by Theodore Sturgeon

Dear Sam, Many congratulations on your recent releases in general and THE LOVERS (about which you have spoken about what I have spoken about it) and WHAT'S IT LIKE OUT THERE in particular. These two stories are noteworthy for many reasons, but, it seems to me, the most intriguing is that Farmer's is remarkable in its excellence because he's a new writer; Hamilton's is remarkable in its excellence because he's a warhorse. Despite the paradox, both men deserve congratulations devout, humble, noisy, heartfelt.

But special comment, I think, must go to Sherwood Springer's thought-provoking story NO LAND OF NOD, and it could be that Mr. Springer won't be too happy about the thoughts it provokes.

Let me begin by saying that Springer had the right idea in writing this particular story—it needed doing—and by the same token you did well to print it. Kudos to both of you. *But*—

If art—fiction, that is—is to hold the mirror up to nature, this story is a most unnatural reflection. The story that *is* a story—like the two mentioned above—puts the reader in the action so vividly that the protagonist's adventures are recalled as experience, not as entertainment. I feel that Springer failed to make the mark he could have made because of an inability to shuck off the very mythos he attacked by writing the story.

First, consider Jim, the protagonist. This is a fine guy. He has a profound sense of responsibility to humanity, and he has the intelligence to figure the ins and outs of his unhappy predicament. In addition, he is in a totally new environment which calls for a totally new set of ethics.

Yet, what does he do? He fights a mighty battle with himself as to whether or not he shall perpetuate himself through his daughters. I consider this an absolutely incredible ground for conflict even in a man ten times as hidebound and half as intelligent as Jim. "Thou shalt not kill" is a pretty deeply conditioned law, but it disappears like a smoke-ring in a wind-tunnel (in all but a tiny fraction of cases) after six weeks of basic training. *Thou shalt cover thy nakedness* is infinitely more ingrained, since the conditioning begins long before analytical consciousness asserts itself; yet a single visit to a nudist camp will convince any unbeliever that this conditioned reflex can leave one in ten seconds flat, never to return (as a reflex)! In other words, present a man with the right surroundings and his morals and ethics will adjust themselves to suit right *now*. Given the sole responsibility for perpetuating the race, and an environment free of any stigma, a conflict such as Jim's would not and could not occur.

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And what, further, does Jim do? Well, before he takes the fateful step, he waits until his eldest girl is eighteen years old. Why, Brer Springer? Did he settle in a state with an age-of-consent law? Or did this genuinely ethical, un-sensuous thinker just overlook the fact that at thirteen or fourteen, the girl was quite capable of conceiving a child—or, more appalling to contemplate, that every single day of delay not only found him more advanced in years, but exposed to this falling rock, that infected wound, or any of a thousand other accidents that might befall him and his truly precious potential? And, having waited until Esther's eighteenth birthday, are we to believe that he would patiently wait one and three years respectively for Charlotte and Anne?

To sum up, I don't believe Jim would have had to wrestle with himself; I don't believe that his daughters, growing up the way they did, would have had the impulse or the conditioning to apply the sort of tact they did to the situation; and, most of all, I don't believe Jim would have taken the appalling chance of waiting that long. And this makes me mad. It makes me mad because this is too important a story to bungle. Taboos need to be broken, either because they are bad in themselves or because of this odd quirk in human beings that makes it necessary to prove they *can* be broken. But when you break 'em, break 'em clean.

I suppose it is necessary at this point for me to forestall the impulsive rebuttal to the effect that I am proposing a new deal for cradle-snatchers or, as E. Hunter Waldo used to remark, get the exterminator, there's incest in the house. Well, I'm doing no such thing. I too have my conditioning, and within our current framework I find the defloration of pubescents repugnant in the extreme. But if science fiction is to remain the viable genre it is, it must be capable of exploration in other frameworks—objectively, and all the way.

But you Springers, Farmers, Hamiltons, Mineses—you're doing a *fine* work in the world for all my fire-breathing. More power to you—*Congers, New York.*

It is to pause and reflect. Just when you are wondering if maybe you've stuck your neck out too far, someone jolts you by remarking you haven't stuck it out far enough. Of course, the basic theme of Springer's story wouldn't be altered if Jim had made up his mind when she was sixteen instead of waiting until she was eighteen so it doesn't actually make any difference. And his struggles with himself are in character and provide the necessary dramatic conflict. For a first step we all seem to agree it is a sizable one.

AND A MILESTONE

by Donald E. Ford

Dear Sam: I *never* write to the mags . . . . . not even after reading S-F for 20 years; but I do want to let you know that I appreciated what you have done in printing NO LAND OF NOD by Sherwood Springer in the December 1952 issue of THRILLING WONDER STORIES.

[*Turn page*]

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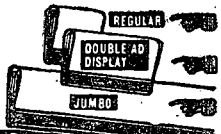

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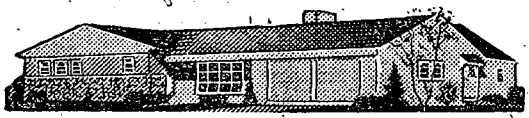

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I don't consider it the best story I have ever read, or anything like that; but I do consider it a milestone in the steps toward breaking down the taboos of the pulp field. You are to be congratulated and encouraged on your step in printing this.—129 *Maple Ave., Sharonville, Ohio.*

A drawer full of other letters saying substantially the same thing is staring us in the face now, of which the above is roughly typical. Of course, a lot of other letters mention it incidentally, like good old reliable out-of-the-dog-house—

OOPSLA
by Gregg Calkins

Dear Sam: Sometimes I wonder why I keep on writing to you, Sam. I'll bet you wonder sometimes, too, don't you? Well, I'll set your wonderings at ease—I'm going to tell you all about it.

First of all, I used to write letters for the sheer pleasure of writing them. Then I wrote them for the egoboo that came from them. Next I wrote letters to plug my fanmag, because it needed them. (Not that it still doesn't, but I decided to stop free-loading on your generosity.) After that I wrote letters because it was instinctive for a fan to write letters. Now I come to a rough spot in the road—you won't print my letters any more. And since I just plain don't write letters to any other editor, save one, I find myself cut off from my egoboo source.

It's a dirty trick, Sam.

But be that as it may, you can't stop me—you're *still* going to get letters from Calkins, print them or no. Especially when you put out issues like the December TWS. Now, you know from long-suffering experience, Sam, that I don't particularly care for TWS out of the five aces you edit. I prefer SS any day because of long novels and monthly publication. I like SPACE because of the space-opera and longer stuff in it. I prefer FANTASTIC STORY and the ANNUAL for the longer length stuff, and the better quality. TWS I buy mostly to complete my files.

I don't prefer TWS because it's composed of short stuff. Patient hours of reading and re-reading have convinced me that the shorter length material is usually of poorer quality, and once you have read it, it is gone. It is so short that more often than not, it never needs re-reading. And hence the cold shoulder I turn toward TWS.

But for December you fooled me. Of course I expected Crossen to be good. He invariably is, and besides his reputation, you have built up an additional reputation for him with the series of Manning Draco novelets you've kept going. So I read it and was pleased with the result—not surprised, just pleased. I expected a better than average story, and got it.

"CANTERBURY APRIL" caught me a little off stride. I was expecting a mediocre companion to go with the good Crossen piece, and this new twist found me 'way off base. I was surprised as well as pleased this time. But then I began to dread. Ever since your blurbs for the new Hamilton novelet I had been looking forward to it with anticipation. That's why I read the rest of the mag

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first—to save the best for the last. But now I was dismayed. With two good "short novels" in the mag, the companion novelet was sure to be below average, and I shuddered. And after the magic of the title, too.

So, again I was caught off base, and this time entirely unprepared for it. I was left with that empty feeling a critic has when he finds out suddenly that he doesn't have a damn thing left to gripe about—and it's a horrible feeling, believe me.

Why, even the shorts were outstanding for your usual selection, Sam. Either you're reading them in the afternoon, now, when you're entirely awake, or you stopped picking them by smell. NO LAND OF NOD was absolutely outstanding, and the other three, tho weaker, backed it up fairly fine. The departments seconded the issue solidly, and there I was . . .

. . . off base. If all the times I was left off base this issue had been runs, I would have had enough to win the series all by myself, Sam. The Yankees and Dodgers didn't stand a chance against me!

As for your departments, I rather like this idea of a guest editorial. Just tell me when Bixby gets to write one, will you? (I heard a funny thing concerning Bixby. Here is this very cute gal writing *me* a letter. As a post-script, what do you think she writes? "PS. Can you tell me anything about Jerome Bixby?" I was flabbergasted. But, of course, you can imagine how flabbergasted that girl is going to be after I *tell* her something about Jerome Bixby. Oh, yes, I'll tell her . . . .)

Sam, in your "editorial"—that little squib you had ahind Merrill and afore the letters—you touched on a point I consider important. If fandom had no other good points (and I'm not saying it has, you notice) that alone would indicate it was worthy of standing! By "that," I mean your own realization of ". . how remarkably international in character is the fan movement." Yes, and how remarkably unprejudiced, for the most part. Besides the few radicals you get in any group, it is surprising to find how few fen sneer at difference in color, creed or religion. All the fen I have ever known are remarkably broad-minded. They discuss and argue religion, they're definitely partisan, and they're often deep in their own little rut, but not one of them is so narrow or shallow that he cannot accept and realize the other man's viewpoint on *anything!* Where else do you find this universal broad-mindedness? And, I might add, *open*-mindedness. No, Sam, if for no other reason, the fan must be recognized. And he's not necessarily broad-minded *because* he is a fan—rather, because he *is* broad-minded, he is a *fan*. And, though sometimes it seems deeply hidden behind their unpenetrable barrier of malfunction and misinterpretation, I sometimes think science fiction editors are that way, too.

My congratulations to Joe Gibson for a delightful letter, and to Jerry Bixby for a really enjoyable "Frying Pan."—761 *Oakley Street, Salt Lake City, Utah.*

This must really have been a horrible feeling, Gregg. All set to gripe, fingers poised over the keys, expletives trembling on the fingertips and —gaah. Speechless. Poor guy. Then think of me. Forced into the untenable position of hav-

[*Turn page*]

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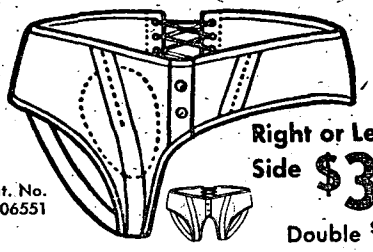

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ing to agree with you about the December TWS. Put the rubber nose back on.

CORRECTION
by Kendell Foster Crossen

Dear Sam: In the December issue of TW there appeared a small opus of mine yclept THE CAPHIAN CAPER. May I hastily explain one or two small items before some character starts to pin back the ears of Crossen, Mines and Bixby?

It is quite obvious that we (Terra) have been invaded by a Kochabian Print-Worm.*. (Perhaps I should explain that when I was a mere barefoot schoolboy in Southern Ohio I was accustomed to writing the exam-answers on my otherwise bare feet and that this is why I am still so addicted to footnotes.) I have been aware of this for some time, but was willing to keep silent until personally attacked.

We will pass over such things as "switch" suddenly becoming "twitch" as these things will happen when the Print-Worm is just warming up. But then we come to the Fignewton Law and there they really got their licks in. In the mathematical expression of the Law what now appears as rr should be the symbol for pi. In a similar fashion, the symbol X (the sign of multiplication) became . (the decimal point). This may seem unimportant to the mathematical-Kallikaks in the audience, but the rest of us know that the substitution of rr for pi changes the Fignewton Law into the Theory of the Excluded Cosine which would prove that Caph II doesn't exist at all—and you can imagine what that would do to the Time Fracture.

The proof of Fignewton's Law should have appeared as:

$$s = \frac{v^2 \sin 2A}{g}$$

instead of coming out as:

$$s = v^2 \sin 2A$$

which, of course, is the old Gouiff Theory proving that any sort of sex relations between two virgins is considered a sin on Acamar II. This, you must admit, is quite a different matter from proving the correctness of Fignewton's science.

So much for *Typographus Kochabus Erratum.* In the meantime, since this was Manning Draco's last appearance (not counting the fact that he *will* be out in a book within the next few months), I'd like to thank everyone who wrote such nice things about him in letters to "The Reader Speaks" and "The Ether Vibrates." Manning and I love all of you.

For shame on Marion Zimmer Bradley. "The Fountainhead" the best book of the century indeed! —*Island Park, N. Y.*

**Typographus Kochabus Erratum* are nocturnal creatures, so fond of darkness that they vanish at the mere suggestion of light. No one has, therefore, ever seen one so there are no descriptions available. It is known, however, that they become quite intoxicated from rubbing against lead. As a result, their natural habitat is the print shop where they pass the time by carrying lead back and forth —changing a number of letters in the process.

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Peculiarly enough, nobody complained. However, Hank Moskowitz complained about the time element on Caph II. He said that "Manning explained his son by saying that he and the Mrs. had been on Caph II for ten months while being gone from Earth for only two weeks. Good enough. But before he had said that an Earthman wouldn't age more than his two weeks Earth time." However, Mrs. Draco would have had to age in nine months to produce a baby, no? Explain that one, Ken. We're expecting a toothache.

UNPREMEDICATED HEIGHTS

by Richard E. Geis

Dear Sam: I'm still chuckling over a little book I happened to pick up ("happened" isn't the word, as soon as I saw it displayed I leaped like Albert when he spies a basket lunch,) in the book dept. of the store in which I work. I brought this book home and laid it beside the Dec. issue of TWS which had arrived in that day's mail. Sorry, Sam, but . . . . well, I GO POGO won the toss. (I used a two-headed quarter.) After all, I can always read your magazine the next day, but Pogo has just *got* to be consumed instanter. If not sooner.

And it was a real cohinkie-dinky to read your comment that Pogo was the only comic book you ever bought for yourself. I like you even more, Sam. My opinion of you has reached hear-to-four unpremedicated heights. Now, if some of the characters in the stories you print had as much personality as the critters in Okefenokee swamp. . . .

THE CAPHIAN CAPER by K. F. K. was not as funny as the first stories about Manning Draco. In fact, I'm not so sure it was funny at all. It seemed that K. F. K. didn't do much but tell a straight adventure yarn with some supposed-to-be-humorous trimmings. The footnotes were excellent, however. Did you do those, Sam? I fear that you made a slight error in the higher math in the note on page 16. Where you state: ". . .the past has negative x 20 (N x 20) time coordinates, the present has zero x 20 (Z x 20) time coordinates, and the future has positive x 20 (P x 20) time coordinates.", is a leetle bit wrong. There was one factor that was not taken into consideration. I refer to the Geis-Willits Worple Warpage Effect which has serious and harmful possibilities when viewed from the bio-technical melagenous employment of a contigually framped reverse triomented extrinsicalogism of the Mines-Bixby type. Thus:

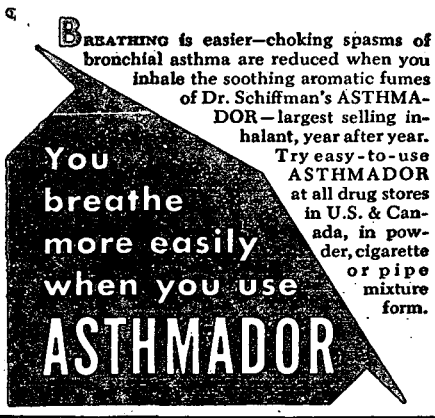
$$f = Mz^{a}\tfrac{1}{2}\frac{b\ e\ m}{g\ h\ u}/324z \quad @ \quad \$3.99$$

which reduces to

$$f = c\frac{o\ (mMOx0)}{a}26\ 72^{a}$$

and therefore proves once and for all that "The Theory of the Excluded O" is a mathematical pile of junk. I'm sure you will print this letter in the spirit in which it was sent. That is, in the interests of scientific Truth, the above should be presented to the readers of your magazine. If it is not, much harm could be wrought by careless and anti-social amateurs.

[*Turn page*]



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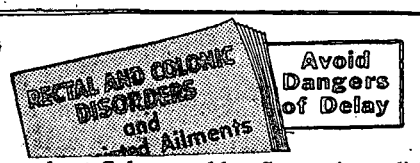

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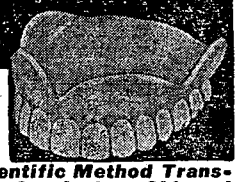

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Thank you for your time, Sam.—2631 *N. Mississippi, Portland 12, Oregon.*

Why blame me for Crossen's footnotes? This looks like a clear case of cold footsnotes—that Pogo influence again. Manning Draco is going into a book in case you haven't heard—the four stories which appeared originally in TWS.

NO HALOS

by Joe Gibson

Mines, that did it! Henceforth, you are on my censored-list, bub. I am a-tremble with mighty rage atcha.

But this December TWS started off disappointingly, anyway. Know what was wrong with Popp's cover? It shoulda been Schomburg's Butterfly Girl in color, instead, thassall. So I gotta gaze at the interior illo and dream? I would swear Al used to illustrate Ackerman's fanzine VoM.

And speaking of swearing we get back to you, Sam. Back in Trs—in the back-end of Trs! You played down one of the most important news-items that's hit science-fiction since van Vogt grew tendrils! Y'just skimmed over it, like it was nothing atall! You didn't even print the letterz about it!

And it just happens I *told* you what'd happen if you or any other character dasted cross these gals. Uh huh, I'm referring to the new fanclub for gals only, being organized by Marian Cox, that you passingly mentioned Evelyn Gatoe announced in her missive. Kee-rist, Sam, don'tcha realize the repercussions this'll have? Fandom (chuckle) will never be the same! ! !

In short, chum, this is where we separates the men from the boys. And I'm gonna separate some Mines, too.

Now, this Sam Mines is a good boy, if y'like good boys—he's just got nothing in those heads of his! Ergo, he don't need 'em. And after this slippery deal, I am just the guy to chop-chop-chop; go tell Bixby he can move his things in here, now. The only trouble with *that* bhoy is, as a piano-player, he never spent Sunday mawnin' in a jail-house. Nextime I crawl under a keyboard with a drink and m'pipe, I expects to hear better noise than mood riffs—or gives the old Cherokee souvenir-collecting! Savvy?

I'm just in a mean temper, I guess. But thanx to Jim Harmon for mentioning mam'selle Marlene Maples—only tell Shelby Vick, not me! *I* know we got beautiful femme fans. Even unmarried and unprofessional (!??!) as Vick specified. I've met 'em. Peggy Gordon, down in Landsdowne, Pa., has the most beautiful Sleepy-Eyes you done evah did see, man! And a certain li'l WAVE out at Great Lakes Naval Training Station is the cutest angel ever drifted down this way—had me hearing chimes inside 15 seconds! Name's Betty Jo McCarthy, sailor, and she's strictly from Heaven—California, that is.

And Vick is a bit squeamish, I guess, but there are some lovely gals around who're happily making some guy happy—they got married, y'know—and I'm just as happy about them. 'Course, it probably depends on what you got in mind. But take Gerry de la Ree, now—somebody take him, please?—the thing I love about that guy is his wife! Helen

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wouldn't launch any ships; she'd have the whole darned navy AWOL! Just gimme a wife like that—that's all I ask—such a simple, little request. But Gerry's the only guy in her life, always will be. That's the thing about these beautiful, but married femme fans. Gad, maybe Shelby's right—I almost *reenlisted!* And what a pleasant glow a guy can get when beauteous, blonde Ginny Saari just smiles at him! Some Olivers have all the luck. And the girl that married—oh, what's the use, these dreams hurt too much—

I should write a treatise on beautiful femme fans, sometime. Vick, poor deluded bhoy, thinks a beautiful gal is too busy otherwise for such "escape" stuff as science-fiction. That fans are only composed of nine parts introvert and one part mutant. Little he knows that beauty is a curse as well as a blessing—

F'rinstance, such as the way a guy-fan usually feels when (sigh) he meets one of these beautiful gal-fans. It's not like meeting the other femme fans. They're sharp, appealing, and fun; they belong with the gang. But you meet a beautiful one, you start mumbling, you automatically place her up high on a white pedestal; she's something rare and precious. And she doesn't have so much fun . . .

It takes Gibson to understand these things. Naturally, if anybody expected me to mention a couple of young ladies—make it three—who just happen to reside in my particular neighborhood, there is a somebody for the "boy category. Nuff sed? I thot so.—*24 Kensington Ave., Jersey City 4, N. J.*

Joe, you're beginning to sound frustrated. First thing you know, the female fans will be sending you boxes of cookies and stuff. Why is a fan club for women the most important item since van Vogt? Would the women be pinning halos on you if they could get along without men?

Untouched by human hand are too many letters left over even to list in our usual rundown at the end—thanks to all the brave souls who wrote in.

One announcement: Jerry Bixby has taken off to try his hand at free-lance writing. As those of you who knew him were aware, he is a writer of a fine and sensitive talent. We expect much of him. See you all back here soon.

—*The Editor*

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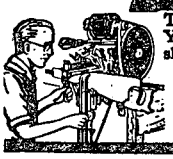

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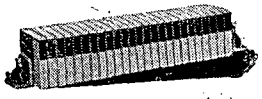

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